

**COLOURED COVER**

**ONE MISTAKE** 

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**A MANITOBA REMINISCENCE**

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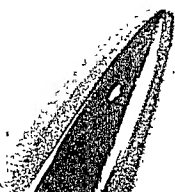
BY ZERO.





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MONTREAL:  
CANADA BANK NOTE COMPANY, LIMITED.  
1888.



## ONE MISTAKE.

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This stage is for myself to strut upon, and therefore,  
“Enter Miss Devigne” :—

“Average height; better than an average figure; an oval face, the whiteness of the skin of which is rendered more remarkable by the crowning presence of abundant, smooth, black hair, and by the frequent flows of colour which paint the cheeks with little provocation; distinctly pencilled brows, arching over eyes classed by the majority as brown, which sometimes positively glitter, but do not keep the constant glint, in sunlight and in gaslight, so often seen in certain of the prettiest brown eyes; good teeth, on which account you often laugh; a nose that certainly set out intending to be Grecian, but, coming to the point, shews sympathy with Rome, though this in such a slight degree that you may, with equanimity, accept the compliments of any of the ancient World’s admirers, according to prevailing light and shade.”

The above is ME, as painted by a somewhat partial friend, and unreliable as such description must naturally be, it still composes (and comprises) all my stock in trade. When to this you add the motto I uphold, “Vive l’amour,” you have as full a knowledge of my personelle as I can trust myself to write.

I am, or rather, have been—and fear I should still be, were inclination all I had to guide me in my future life—

a thorough-going flirt. Opportunity has favoured me with large experience in the great profession, for more years than I dare venture to unfold, and now—my tether growing shorter day by day—I wish to give account of my last year of liberty, whilst yet the taste is in my mouth; before the misanthropic stage arrives. My object in so doing is purely philosophic. I wish to shew the kind of world in which we live, and the way to travel best; and, if you take the good advice, dear girl, of one who knows whereof she speaks, and follow Moore's behest to love the lips that are around you, when dearer are away, I am sure my labour will reap gratitude.

Good people (a word to the wise), this is but necessary training, for are we not informed, by the very first of Authors, that the atmosphere of that celestial place to which you all aspire is LOVE? And yet we hear, again, that marriage is an unacknowledged state—in fact there's no such thing. Then, what is this, if not flirtation in its purest form? And very right it is that such should be the case. It were a crime, with little palliation, to suppose that angels, ecstatically blessed, should pass their time in twanging harp strings (albeit golden ones). Yet this is what is offered to the "very good" on earth by ignorant pretenders. Imagination must, indeed, be at low ebb when such a state gains reputation as the best of all things possible.

However, my intention never was to deal with possibilities of Heaven, or probabilities of Hell, or any other subject half as blue. I simply wish to say a word in favour of a very good old pastime, but for which my life would, indeed, have been a sunless one, and many, many happy hours would be erased from memory.

Men have their fun in landing a lively twenty-pounder of a fish, and one successful effort is enough to fill a life with joy. How he struggled, jumped, then sulked, and would not move an inch. It was sublime, undoubtedly. How marvellously does the gallant creature grow! He can, without an extraordinary effort (though occasionally he owes a little to good spirits), run up his weight as high as thirty pounds, some ten years subsequent to death.

But woman looks for larger prey, and who will hesitate to name the nobler sport? The salmon's course is stayed by a thin, but also quite strong, line. *Our* captives are but seldom held by anything more stable than a woman's hair, and even that is sometimes of a very startling hue—though (safely hid myself) I have, with something very near akin to genuine amusement, watched the look upon a victim's face as he declared, with all the fervency of innocence (though doubtless adding to the lengthy list of charms possessed by his gay fisherwoman the culminating one of idiocy) that the manifestly purest red-brick top-knot in the world was nothing less than "Auburn Glory," if you please.

But, spite of all our troubles, we still amuse ourselves, and occasionally land a salmon, too.

## II.

I have just returned from that land of Vast Futurity, the Canadian Northwest, and must admit that, taken on the whole, sport there is good. To be sure, the game is somewhat small; but the fisherwoman used to angling for the old and wary nibblers of blasé London drawing-rooms feels no small pleasure in pulling up a trout or two upon occasion, if only for the purpose of proving her ability to fish.

My sister Olive and myself, in making our visit of a year (or rather, of ten months, for the intended stay was shortened to that time), were offered as a sacrifice to a mother's great affection for her son. Our brother Jack, four years ago, had emigrated to the North, and, though he came a "cropper" in what is now world-famous as the "Boom," ever since his fall (which never had excited in his family the sympathy it ought—we had become so tired of his "croppers" whilst at home) his movements were described by "Oh, he's getting on," which always sounds just one step higher than "He's going to the Devil," and often means, if only we could see our distant friends, much about the same. Our world appeared to wag, in spite of his departure, and we had come to think of him as almost "gone before," so rarely did we hear a word from him.

Suddenly, however, a letter came, in which he tried to get mother and ourselves to pay the "country of his choice" a visit, "for a year at least," he said. Mother declared it was impossible. As for herself, *entre nous*, it prejudice she had, it was against the West. "I'm sorry, "Nell, but I could not stand the voyage, not to mention "what your uncle said about Canadian cookery—'God gave the food and the devil sent the cooks.' Wasn't that the "way he put it?"

"But, mother, we can manage all those things if we "have a house ourselves," I pleaded, for I had a most outrageous longing for a change of air and scene.

"Well, my dear, I don't mind watching your most "wonderful experiments in the culinary art at home, but "would *rather* be excused from trying to subsist upon "them for a year. Besides, of course, there *can* be no "society; except, perhaps, such as might form an interest-

"ing study for philanthropists, and, personally, I think "everyday humanity a far more worthy subject to dissect."

Of a truth, here was a Philistine; and, though I pushed for proofs of this alleged barbarity, the only evidence I could obtain was that a certain noble officer once stayed in Winnipeg and dined with their Lieutenant-Governor. During the hospitable meal he was compelled to drink deep of ginger pop, as being less injurious than the strong green tea alternatively offered. But ginger pop for soup, ginger pop for fish, and ginger pop to a fourth or fifth long course brought matters to a crisis, and when he would fain have smoked a fine Havana, Nature cried aloud for a visit to the most convenient doctor, and nothing but successive "brandies, neat," had brought the patient round.

"But, mother, we are not like men, and do not need "to tipple brandy for enjoyment's sake."

"No, dear, but you see how ignorant the people are "of what goes to form the comfort of a man. Can we "expect them to have any other civilized ideas of modern "days?"

And so the matter lay, and would have lain till now, but Colonel Denton, an old friend of my mother's (a gay old boy, and quite a "masher" with the widows, who were very much enamoured of his six feet two of military manhood), came in one day, and intimated his resolve, in company with young Clifford, who wished to make the trip, of "seeing the Northwest ranches near to Calgary, visiting some friends out there, afterwards returning home by way of China and the East."

Then the history of Jack's wish for some of us to visit Winnipeg was talked about, and, after some discussion as to time, ways and means, etc., it was finally decided that

our party, comprising Colonel Denton, Mr. Clifford (whom I had frequently met at dances and found very tolerable), Olive and myself, should start from Liverpool a fortnight later, on board the ship "Parisian," of which we heard some very good accounts.

Thus, everything was well. Our mother was delighted that Jack would now see "some of us," and we looked forward to a year of life without the leading strings.

### III.

At last we really were afloat; not valiantly buffeting mountainous waves, to be sure, but with a steady, sober motion, churning our way down the unromantic Mersey, and making certain progress towards the more poetic ocean,—albeit its poetry is sometimes very much akin to that of Browning—definition beyond the power of mortal man, but exciting feelings we fain would hide from all our friends. The churning soon gave way to a rather more effective choppiness, but even this, destructive as it was to the happiness of some, appeared to spare our party. Olive looked as bright as, and rather prettier than ever, I thought. Her clear-cut features, the brilliant colour of her cheeks, a sparkle in her light grey eye and little wisps of dark brown hair escaping from their bonds, all combining to create what Colonel Denton most gallantly said was "the British maiden as she ought to be."

Of repeated yachting trips had made her and myself respectable as sailors, and the freshness of the breeze did nothing more disastrous than increase our appetites, already not unhealthy.

At Queenstown we said good-bye to the British people, who at that pretty spot are not seen to advantage on

board the passing steamers; and, shortly afterwards, the night drew down upon us. Then Cape Clear's warning light came into view, and apparent to the senses of us all was the long Atlantic swell. Here was an opportunity for a volunteer to gain immortal fame by the singing of "My Native Land, Good Night." But no one's voice was in the proper trim. The last of all things tangible grew gradually less, and the vessel forged her way ahead, like Destiny itself, into the unfathomable blackness of the sky and sea. Mr. Clifford and I had struck upon a "cool, sequestered" nook, from which to watch the slow extinction of our country's light, at that time shining, most inappropriately, as we both agreed, from the inhospitable shore of Ireland.

Mr. Clifford was a dark, good-looking man, with an incipient moustache; brown eyes, and a rather square-cut face. His forte, as it appeared to all his first acquaintances (female ones, of course,) was telling tales of former "mashes" he had made, and calling all the gods to witness that "he never *really* cared a straw for anyone before." Briefly, Mr. Clifford was yet young, and the character of "Wild" had still some charms for him.

Report, however, said that his success in love had met with one reverse, at least; and certainly he quoted poetry that night with a feeling such as does not often come without some knowledge of a desperate *affaire du cœur*.

After the light had made its bow, and the lonely feeling which ensued on its extinction had somewhat merged in the sweets of *tête-à-tête* with a positively innocent young man, I commenced to feel somewhat more at home, and tried to make the best of things (and men)—my invariable custom. The prey was that very night almost within my clutches, but fog and cold declared their

war against me, and drove us down the hatchway and apart, me to toss and roll and kick through the first night at sea, of which my wild young man would spend the greater part in cultivating "dreadful habits," as his dear aunt would doubtless say.

## IV.

On ship-board, where one's number of acquaintances is very circumscribed, the idiosyncrasies of each are matters of importance to the whole, and (always granting three days' grace to conquer Neptune's bumptiousness) a change of front, or other deviation from the customary course, of any of our friends gives rise to speculation. Curiosity in me was very much excited by a sudden gloom which seemed to cloud over the (as it at first appeared) rather overpowering flow of Mr. Clifford's spirits. This feeling once aroused, it tore down all its bounds, and soon I found myself straining every nerve of the imagination to plausibly account for the young man's voluntary exile from his native land, with the London Season at its height and money in his pocket to enjoy its every charm. I resolved to try my best to draw the mystery from its mysterious owner, if opportunity would but serve me decently.

Meanwhile, however, everything was dull. I sat upon the deck, from morning until night, and struggled hard, though vainly, to believe that sea-life was enjoyable. The relaxation from my usual work was altogether too complete. I MUST have some excitement or expire. Olive, seemingly, existed happily enough, thanks to a library which, though of limited dimensions, yet contained "the very latest fiction." With this, it grieves my heart to say, she was evidently bent on vitiating Colonel Denton's literary taste. Judging from appearances, her efforts were

not unattended with success, the dear old boy devouring anything and everything, with an avidity and interest which would have put to shame the average school girl in her teens. I even caught him bargaining with a fine, well dried-up specimen of maiden hopefulness, for an exchange of "She" for "Moths." Of the latter of the two he vowed he never heard before, and, on my expostulation, was quite prepared to swear that he was interested through belief that the subject of the work was really entomology. "Yes," he was driven to confess, "I read it through, disgusting as it is. It would never do to let a maiden lady, however antiquated, get the better of me now. I hope you never read such trash."

"Oh, mother does not like either Olive or me to read such books as that." (Somehow, they do get read, though I never could explain the *modus operandi*—very shortly after publication, too.)

About the fourth day out I was sitting on the deck pretending, and really trying hard to make myself believe the sham, to read what, in my hurry, I had mistaken for a "latest novel." In front of me, as I occasionally could see, when I raised my head to watch the ocean's swell, and noted its effect upon the ship and me—for I was now the least bit squeamish—walked Mr. Clifford, with the air of him who takes a constitutional, despite all obstacles. Backwards, forwards; forwards, backwards; like the ticking of a clock the sacrifice to hygiene was made. Weary of this monotony, the good ship gave a lurch, and by a common accident my wicker chair shot out, doubled up, and left me on the deck, a sight to raise up pity in a Stoic's heart, and which quickly brought the walker to my aid, full of commiseration.

"I hope you are not hurt at all," he said, picking up me, cushions and book, in the strictest "order of merit" way.

"Oh, no. Thank you for your very timely help. These chairs are the most stupid things I know—always "trying to shut up when you want to sit upon them." Dropping into another of the kind, and leaving the offender gaping for one victim more.

"Possibly they are something like my own poor sex. You sit upon them and they *must* shut up. Now, I can "rest without the slightest danger," settling himself into the chair which I had so ungracefully vacated, and thereby walking straight into my net; "they never play their "tricks upon a man."

Of his man-like crow, on the power of his sex to take their seats (some ladies say that women shall equally be blessed ere long. Tyrants, beware!) I leniently took no notice, but simply said: "Unfortunately, it is not always "as you would make out. The people one *attempts* to sit "upon are just the ones who never *will* shut up."

"However that may be, I pray you, Miss Devigne, "have mercy, and don't experiment on me. I feel quite "flat enough already. I don't know when I was so "blue."

"I see that you are reading 'Henry Esmond,'" turning the leaves of the book he just picked up, "Thackeray's "woman is 'just too sweet for anything,' is she not?"

"Speaking for myself, I think I could forgive her if "she lost some *savoir faire*, and grew a little closer to the "natural. What a curious ring you wear."

"Yes. This is about the only heirloom I possess. "Just look at it," holding out his hand for my examination.

I took it in my own. On his little finger was a rather massive, very well worn ring, in which was set a lozenge-shaped, black stone, having as its centre the most dazzling little diamond I ever yet beheld. The gold was formed to represent a snake, its tail stuck in its mouth.

"A genuine talisman, I judge, from all appearances," I said. "Is the story such as one may hear, without too great a danger?"

"Its history is far too long to tell to any but one's grandchildren, born to be tormented in that way. Briefly, according to our creed, a Clifford (in the twelfth or thirteenth century—I don't know which) returning from the East, brought that. It is symbolical (also according to our creed) of an everlasting troth. The diamond—which shines more brilliantly since my father had it cut, they say—represents a burning love. The ring itself is the Talmudic hieroglyph to signify eternity—a serpent swallowing its tail. The tradition in our family endows the ring with the most unswerving loyalty to the rightful Clifford heir. So strong a feeling is this with my people that, should it actually disappear and be positively lost (though I believe I have enough of superstition in my soul to make me doubt the possibility), I really think that they would look upon me as a king deposed."

"What an interesting, mediæval tale," I laughed. "If I had such a ring, I should keep it under lock and key, and live on pins and needles when I showed it to a friend."

Just then Olive passed, staring most outrageously, and I became aware that I was still retaining and inspecting a hand I had kept lovingly within my own for five minutes at the least. I dropped it like a cinder, and Mr. Clifford

smiled an understanding smile, as though he liked the joke.

"Oh, you have no reverence for talismans like this," said he. "It has passed through the hands of scores of Cavaliers, as token of innumerable things—its paltry worth, perhaps, its chief protection—when adherence to the Cause was somewhat costly, and treachery in *men* not utterly unknown, yet never went astray; and my faith is that, as long as Cliffords are, that ring will be, and they will cling together."

"How nice to have so strong a faith in anything on earth. I thought all men were thorough misbelievers, and put no trust in aught beneath the sky. What a treasure you would be to champion woman's cause against her enemies. Now, don't you think the rôle would fit you well?"

My question seems to drive him back to his starting point of blue; makes him remember that he *should* look sad, and sad he looks forthwith.

Dolefully: "I should like to be her champion, Miss Devigne, did I not know too much about her ways. The World says (the female world, I'll bet,) that woman is what man has made her. What wretched stuff that is! The woman makes the man; and 'Woman's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands weep.' Take the case of any jolly woman, such as we meet each day the whole year round—a regular flirting bombshell, of whom it would be flattery to say that her vows were traced in sand, or that she accidentally spoke the truth:—she does more harm in two or three short hours than any man could compass during life. It's sure as Fate, a woman's at the bottom of every man's misfortune."

"I know whereof I speak" was so painfully obtrusive in his look, that I was quite unable to forbear, and said:

"What a statistician you must be! Have you any 'Miserable Club' from whence to draw your figures? Or is it *all* your personal experience? Please look the other way, and I will blush for my unfeeling sex. Though, of course, a stupid *individual* has brought us *all* beneath your ban. Am I not a sorceress?"

"I think you are a witch, if that is what you mean"—brightening up again.

"I do feel a little eery now, and believe that I can read that terrible misfortune of your heart: the one which made you such a woman's enemy, I mean. Do you doubt it?"

"No, indeed. I have seen enough of the eyes of Miss Devigne to doubt their power over all the universe. But, just for fun, you may try them on my past."

In giving this permission, he did not seem to anticipate much "fun," although he gave the word to "go ahead."

"Well, don't add me to your list of deadly enemies, if I come too near the truth. And, above all things, remember that, as a seer, I am infallible, and brook no contradiction."

"You loved, rash man! Regardless of the cynic world, and clever Mrs. Norton (perhaps you never read 'Love Not,' in which case we shall pity more than blame you). Oh, how you loved! And she—she was divine (a fact which you were good enough to let her know); and, by reason of her Godhead, she saw a base mortality in you (no offence intended, if you please; I haven't grown *my* pen feathers yet). Still, could she not per-

"ceive the cloven hoof of an intermeddling fiend, who——"

"You might spare me these heroics, Miss Devigne, if "you *really* know my story," he broke in, with a voice so very low, subdued and lumpy, that it gave me quite a start of sympathy.

"I beg a thousand pardons, Mr. Clifford. I really did "not know the slightest thing, and I'm very, very sorry "for my thoughtlessness."

"Oh, please don't look at it like that. A fellow in "my own condition is so terribly thin-skinned that he'll "imagine anything. But—Miss Devigne—you are so "really honest that I should so much like, if it would not "bore you awfully, to tell my little tale to you. I'm "nothing but a boy, you know. Do you think you could stand it?"

And, truly, he was nothing but a boy (a very nice boy, too, I thought), against whom I was quite an ancient dame. Of course, I could not be so churlish as refuse to listen to his woes, and—and—well, Eve was my ancestress, an accident quite unavoidable. I cannot now recall the words of acquiescence which I used; doubtless they were dignified and awful; though, remembering their effect, it seems to me (but so much time has slipped away since then that memory is perfectly unsafe) the blood within the Clifford veins was not congealed thereby.

The night was coming on. Dinner had drawn the little crowd downstairs, and we two were alone. Mr. Clifford rose, put some shawls around me, and slipped down amongst the dozen rugs which lay upon the deck, around my feet.

In front of us the mighty waves rolled past, each striking deeper in the heart that sense of utter impotence

and—sometimes—loneliness which night upon the sea, above all else, creates in most intensity. And, at such time, how beautiful a thing is human sympathy! Thus Mr. Clifford seemed to think, and the pathos of his story lost no whit because of it. And how skilfully he told the tale! The blackest of perfidy (in parentheses) was toned down (in the narrative) to an everyday affair, and one which, under existing circumstances, should (this in deep humility) have certainly been calculated on. In face of all this magnanimity, it was difficult to think (though I believe it firmly) that the self-same man (or any other angel of his sex) would, before a picked assembly of male friends, in the presence of a few half-emptied tumblers, and surrounded by an atmosphere of smoke, so deal with his deceiver that she should have, long ere the midnight hour, neither honour, brains, nor a modicum of looks, with which to bless herself.

He had loved—adored—her; and she was held to be the flower of a family in itself the choicest growth of a very highly favoured place, from the human florist's view. And they were to have been made one in May. That locket held her hair (golden, of course). It was incredible how one so beautiful as she who hung that little locket on its chain could be so false. She had looked straight into his eyes and sworn eternal things. And now—but, psha! All women were alike. "I mean, of course, all women of that very fair complexion." Yes, a fool of a fellow came from Town; his reputation as a steady-goer, too, fell far below the average of men. His sole enchantment (the ownership of which his tailor might with justice have disputed) being Her Majesty's gay uniform, which uniform, in three short weeks, had scattered far and wide the fruits of

years of education ("Oh, yes! I educated her to love me; "you needn't laugh at that") and hard toil. No; they were not married yet. But, did I think that HE would ever look at her again, even should she go down upon her knees and beg?

My own opinion was (though I did not think my duty lay in offering it then) that a condescension infinitely smaller than the bending of a knee would have made him register more vows of constancy in one short hour than he had sworn terrific oaths of vengeance since the committal of the outrage.

But I consoled him as only woman can. The girl was evidently a poor, short-sighted little maiden. Doubtless pretty, in her dolly fashion, but wanting much in genuine character. Yes; of course, she was an unsophisticated girl. Commend me to the damsels of that ilk for wanton trickery, with neither rhyme nor reason. But, possibly, she thought it quite a harmless thing to flirt. It is so hard to say where flirting ends and love-making begins. What was Mr. Clifford's view upon that point?

Well, Mr. Clifford really hardly had a view (went it blind). Of course, some women do exist, with such sunny, open, jolly souls, that enjoyment by themselves is quite beyond the possible; and, in their downright honesty, these are often said, by Autumnal single ladies and would-be wise young men, to be gay flirts. He thought he knew a case in point, not very far away. But the good and honest portion of the World (himself amongst the number) laid nothing at the door of these maligned ones. It was their great misfortune to be loved by all; sometimes more and sometimes less; always more at sea. And to blame them for their happy disposition was to blame the sun for

shining, etc., etc., etc., until I saw the Colonel in the distance, and slipped downstairs (leaving instructions for a splitting headache) in fear and trembling lest I should stumble over Olive.

## V.

After Mr. Clifford's confidence, the time, for some good reason, appeared to slip away quite unobserved, and never hung one moment on my hands. There was always something to be done, or talked about—principally the latter. If books could not be discussed, then tales of other days could be descanted on, and when these, in their turn, grew dry, some questions would suggest themselves (rather personal they were occasionally, I fear,) which *must* be duly weighed; at least, so Mr. Clifford said, and I agreed so long as he produced material to throw into the scales. The phosphorescent light, too, was another of our charges, and entailed some views of moonlight on the sea which, quite naturally, inspired poetic thoughts, and these equally of course, found vent, through my companion, in the words of him whose too intense delight in Nature's varied beauties led him nowhere if not to his destruction: I am inclined to think, however, that the voyage lost to him one faithful follower in scepticism as to woman's character.

"Since I first met you, Miss Devigne, my views have undergone a change so deep that now I almost doubt the truth of that man's sight whose words seemed portion of my soul a few short weeks ago. I should like to ask of you, as the most honest woman it has been my lot to meet, was Byron's reading of a woman true?" propounded Mr. Clifford—now my almost sole companion (females always shun me like a pestilence)—during one of our moonlight studies of the deep.

"I will tell you precisely what I think about it. The "one reflection Byron caught in his adored ones' eyes was "Byron's fickle self. Treat woman fairly, honestly, and "fairly she will meet you. But treat her as a play-thing, "fool or jest, and commonly you'll find the jest a bitter "one, the fool possessed of method in her madness for "revenge, and the play-thing but a fiendish kind of toy "with a devastating power a great deal under-rated."

In that short voyage many much vexed questions found their natural solutions, at least the resolutions come to satisfy the ones concerned, a state of things devoutly to be wished for as the outcome of deliberations wholly male.

But all things have an end; the pleasanter they are, the sooner do they close. Our voyage vanished like a very happy dream, and though its every feature still remains imprinted on the mind, the impression is a dream-like one of stingless happiness.

I think that Olive must have read her library through; and as for Colonel Denton, I do not recollect a single thing he did, except to eat his meals religiously, now and then talk literature with Olive, and scandal of the passengers with me. I know he was delighted when we drew into Quebec. Glad that young Clifford and myself could take no astronomic notes upon the train; glad to be rid of Olive's exclamations of surprise, regarding "impropriety," and quite beside himself to think that Winnipeg once reached, and his charges separated, responsibility would trouble him no more.

At quaint Quebec or busy Montreal, we had no time to stay, the Colonel being in a hurry to reach the Promised Land—a feeling not so plainly visible in Mr. Clifford's case, who wished to stay a little while in Montreal "to rest,"

but his chaperone declared that no rest could be found for such as him. We "got on board" our Pullman, went to bed, and very soon forgot the myriad joys and rampant sinfulness which (I take the natives' word) were being left behind, untouched and unregretted.

We spent three days in travelling through scenes which differed but in their variety of wildness, one question only arising to the mind—How mortals could be found to squander years of their existence (I am not capable of that gross flattery which would call it Life) amidst those barren rocks and half-charred stumps, or still more naked looking prairie. The feminine mind can never be, with any certainty of ultimate success, educated to the point which calculates the intrinsic value of a rough and ugly rock, or the maximum of wheat, per acre, which a sterile looking prairie is capable of yielding, puts all into one picture and calls the whole "Sublime." Such occult reasoning is left exclusively for the naturally strong imaginations of those "Bonanza Kings" and Croesuses of farmers with which their ideal Paradise, now known as "Our Northwest," is, in a fast approaching age, to be over-populated.

The "cars," however, were really comfortable, and, during all the journey there was nothing for Olive or the Colonel to complain about, more serious than monotony, which cannot be affirmed to know existence only on the C. P. R. And we rolled and puffed along until, one bright June morning ("long ago," it seems, indeed, to me) they rolled us into Winnipeg—the Metropolis of the Mammoth West. A faint idea of its attributed importance may be gained from the remark of an Americo-Manitoban who, referring to London, England (to distinguish it from LONDON, which is in Ontario) said "Oh, it's a nice sized place, but too

far away from Winnipeg ever to amount to *much*." I should have thought the speaker was in earnest, but having, ere I heard the speech, become au fait with the customs of the country, I easily detected too truthful an appearance to leave upon my mind a doubt as to sincerity.

Arrived at Winnipeg, or so much of us as was left, and the remains of our "baggage" having been dexterously shovelled all together, in a heap, it next, of course, occurred to us to look at our brother, who, for the last quarter of an hour, had been greeting us persistently. He certainly was changed; and in a way which five years of ordinary wear and tear did not seem satisfactorily to account for. Leaving home at twenty-three, with the freshest of red faces, we now saw him a man who might have been of any age from thirty up to forty, and in English calculation, the first named age was the youngest possible. He stood without his hat, for our inspection, and one could see his head was growing bald, and he had an air of grave responsibility, without which many men in England attain the age of fifty years, and which accorded ill with the vision of a bright, good-looking and most mischief-making boy; which came constantly before me, whilst at home, whenever "Jack" was mentioned. His brightness still remained, to some extent, in an ability to make sharp little speeches about his friends in general, and this replaced the old exuberance of spirits poorly, as I (an interested party) thought.

There he stood, however, evidently as fond of us as in the days gone by, and, though he rather frightened me by looking so antique, for reasons much too personal to tell, I think I did the "loving sister" fairly well, and placed myself beneath his care, midst the Colonel's great rejoicing (at seeing Jack again, he vowed, but getting rid of us, particularly me, I knew it really was).

Jack took us to a "Principal Hotel," which represented home for some few dreary days, pending the completion of arrangements in the house which he had taken for us. Here we vainly tried to gather up a little of our wonted energies (an utterly unnecessary task, had we proposed acting as the Romans do) and fortify ourselves against the coming onslaughts of climate and the critics, both of which, some English people told us, were trials most severe to every immigrant who boasted flesh and blood. But various little incidents frustrated all our plans. One man, who occupied a bed-room next to ours, took on himself to die, and not content with doing it in the real, old-fashioned way, positively groaned out of existence. Though this may, of course (and probably it did), have aided in securing him good rest, it acted not so soothingly on us, and any fortifying that was done was "with neatness and dispatch" at dinner-time, when, inwardly we fortified ourselves with—well, my memory is not reliable, and I might mortally offend the chef, who, by good luck or management, did us no mortal injury, if I went into details. But, outwardly, the pretty waiting girl erected such tremendous bastions and formidable walls, composed of little dishes (reported to contain the Lord alone knows what), that any enemy might look and sigh in vain when it was our royal pleasure to retreat, a not unknown contingency, I found.

Two or three days sojourn in the house, however, and all excitements seemed to disappear. We came to look upon it as quite natural that strong and hearty men should wash soi-disant dinner down their throats with the mildest of green tea, occasionally varied by a draught of bluish liquid, said to be cow's milk. It occurs to me to-day that the cows of Winnipeg are the only water drinkers there,

but they must be the most confirmed of tipplers of the beverage. We gathered "pointers" too, and learnt the proper meaning of the verb "to eat." It is, in Manitoba, just "to swallow" in another form, and the action is a marvellous time-saver, though rather paralyzing if the witness has been reared to look upon a dinner as the one divinity of whom men take real cognizance.

The fourth day was eventful. In the morning Colonel Denton and his one remaining charge departed for the fields still further West. But Mr. Clifford (from thenceforth known as "Fred" under dreadful penalties) before he left, had placed upon my hand a token that the heart so desperately wrecked two months ago was now in my possession. In short, we were engaged, though very privately; and the ring he made me wear was the emblematic one. He said:

"It exists alone for the Clifford heir, you know, and I feel absolutely safe so long as you retain it. The ring is certain to return to me, and it will bring you with it. And, Dearest, don't forget to write to me whenever you've a moment's time to spare. I shall get home as soon as possible, and pray for this long year to end, and then! Won't it be jolly! Now, Nellie, don't you think I might let the Colonel into it? I feel as if I must tell *somebody*."

"No, Fred, don't let a single person know. Just fancy what a fickle heart they'd give you credit for. Why I don't want the reputation of a kidnapper, if you please. Olive would get the whole thing out of you, if you stayed two days longer here, so it's just as well you're going away, perhaps, though it's very, very hard on both of us. But never mind, dear, I think I shall fall ill, and have to leave for home again by the time that you reach there."

So we exchanged the most formal of good-byes, in the stiffest kind of way, as if the "Parlor" in the dull hotel had not been witness of—well, well, it is enough to know we said good-bye, and the many changes in the stream of life which would occur before we met again could, luckily, exert no influence then.

The engine rings its bell, puffs, jerks, and, finally, in triumph, bears away the last of ties which bound us to our land and home.

## VII.

"Our Place," of which many pleasant, and some bitter, recollections, will be carried to my grave, and possibly beyond, was a little, square-built, house, in, or to be true to the country of which this story speaks, on, St. Mary street. It had a cosy look inside, and was plentifully furnished, though chairs and tables, and bric-a-brac especially, upheld "*Noli me tangere*" as their alarming motto, and would, sometimes, if even looked at steadily, collapse without a warning, involving many innocents in their unexpected fall.

The bottom flat consisted of four rooms, which could, luckily, by means of folding doors, be melted into two of ordinary size. The kitchen being quite separated from the house, created no annoyance.

The upstairs portion of the house was a thorough Chinese puzzle. Rooms of the smallest possible dimensions were mixed judiciously with passages so short that commencement and conclusion as applied to their extremes, appeared gross flattery. And yet this jumble had some noteworthy attractions. Flirtation Paradise could not have been devised more skilfully. Each passage had just room enough for two, and no more could, by any possibility, squeeze in.

And here, on Thursday nights and even Friday mornings, for several months, without a single bye, might have been shewn convincing proofs of the wondrous popularity of that old pastime, which, in spite of age and sameness, does yet, and always will, retain at least a spice of its freshness and excitement for us all—except, of course, the cynics, from whom the gods deliver us. Flirtation was the deity who sanctified our maze, and most bountifully did he prosper all his devotees who therein worshipped him.

The first two weeks had fled before we dared attempt to rally from the shocks which were sustained in continuous succession during the general absorption of customs and surroundings, and, though eventually we overcame them all, yet some with weaker stomachs or less healthy constitutions would undoubtedly have given up the ghost (if the natives had considered that worth taking). Still, I reflected, I had come to *live* for one short year, no matter what turned up, and I was by this time quite too well accustomed to even harder work for the sake of a sensation, really to object to any exercise which was so well repaid by its astonishments.

Several introductions, the offices of Colonel Denton (who, in his short stay, appeared to gather round him half the town), together with Jack's (principally male) connection, had made for us a circle of acquaintance from which it would have been a little difficult to eliminate the weeds, had such a thought occurred to us—a most absurd contingency. An indulgent brother chaperoning two gay damsels breathing liberty for one short, solitary year of life, is not a combination one may quite confidently trust to travel *precisely* in that road laid down by Mrs. Grundy, especially in its course throughout the Colonies.

## VIII.

Take India's Summer Season, remove the Native servants and all the life-preserving adjuncts of that clime, and you may almost realize the day, in Winnipeg, of which I am now writing.

Hearing someone give the time as five o'clock, I pulled the remainder of myself together, called on Capt. Warwick, a fair, good-looking and tired (perhaps that was the weather's flattening effect) specimen of England's officer abroad, and with tremendous effort and his aid, rose from the couch upon the grass where I had lain to witness Olive's most successful battling for the honour of our Nation, in the noble, though somewhat overheating, game of Tennis. Her demonstration in the argument of Canada against the "Effete old Land" spoke English in such volumes that approbation rose in cheers all round the field, from the small but cheeky infant whose "Papa had come to farm," and the dawdling English idler, with a day or two to spare for "doing Winnipeg," indifferently.

"Are you going to leave before they finish this last set—just when we may fairly crow a little, Miss Devigne?" yawned the gallant Captain of Hussars, after the exertion above alluded to as raising me from off the ground. "Oh," and in sheer sympathy, I yawned, "I think I leave the Country's flag quite safe in Olive's hands, and if I stay much longer, a grease spot on the earth is all that will remain of Miss Devigne."

"If you are really going, perhaps you will permit me to escort you home."

Such tremendous condescension almost staggered me.

"What, will you, too, desert the field of triumph. Who will cheer the victor?" He was already one of

Olive's pets, and I could not understand this wild desire to leave.

"I think that Esmond will do all that's necessary in that line, assisted—or even unassisted—by your brother. He seems beside himself with joy—and very full of energy."

"And there was light." Poor Mr. Esmond, who had occasioned this bitter feeling, was at that very moment working like a Trojan, with a fan, in the vain endeavour to raise a cooling breeze round Olive's flaming cheeks. The girl looked pretty too, in her loose, white sailor costume, her eyes sparkling, and everything about her speaking of a perfect state of health.

"Well, Captain, if you are determined upon going, you may act as my protector as far as Forty-two (our number) and I will there reward you with a cup of English tea, since we must be national or nothing, it appears."

"Unwittingly, perhaps, you state an awful fact. I can assure you, Miss Devigne, if you had been a man (that's sacrilege, of course) you would quite understand how existence here is rendered bearable by the English ladies only. What we should do without their angel visits, I do not dare to think;" assuming an attitude which should, according to his own idea, be apropos of thought.

I must say, I consider Capt. Warwick intolerably slow. These laboured compliments are such an awful bore, admitting of no use of eyes or any other of the blessings which Nature sparingly has granted to us mortals. I was tired, so I simply drawled:

"Our stand-points in regard to angels are so very different, you know, that I can form no idea. The men out here seem very nice, and as to numbers, an English girl can hardly realize the state of things."

"Well, yes, they are not bad fellows—at all events, "when you have not known them long, they seem quite "nice."

Wonderful to say, this praise by no means damns or injures those discussed, but rather raises them in my poor estimation. They stand in need of some sort of a lift, beyond a doubt, for up to now I have not met one who could hold a post as "passable" at home.

"Half-past five! How time does fly in some society. "I must be off at once, though of course you know how "much I should prefer to stay and drink your tea."

A bow, a smile, a lie, and away goes young Adonis, leaving me in speechless gratitude. I walked into the little room where the darkened windows, tall plants, and an enormous piece of ice upon a sideboard created an atmosphere verging on the bearable. Here I sat and sipped strong tea, and thought, and my thoughts were somewhat blue. Since Fred departed not a man had come beneath inspection whose claims to interest were visible enough to meet the eye of one not usually too exacting. Fred's image had remained with me in such a constant way that, had I been in England, and moving here and there, I should have quickly come to the conclusion that the model lover had at last been found in me. But out in Manitoba, I waited, and concluded not at all. It might be nightmare, change of atmosphere, or anything. At all events, a year of freedom does not come to everybody even *once* in life, and those who are the blessed ones should use the boon as if they valued it.

It occurred to me that there was something radically wrong about the place, however. The women had not time to make themselves agreeable to "girls." The men

were—well, I had *not* had a chance to test that point quite thoroughly. Olive's dictum was that they were "Just delightful," and from their ranks had chosen, as chief aide-de-camp (my blood ran cold to think of it), the very Capt. Warwick who just before had left me at the gate. His jealousy of a certain Mr. Esmond (whom I had never met but pitied most sincerely) was almost too realistic to be funny. That audacious beggar, in his lazy kind of way, had dared to gaze admiringly on Olive, and even went so far as to fan her scarlet face; and gained, thereby some measure of approval! To be sure, Capt. Warwick in Olive's presence was a very different being from Capt. Warwick with the uninitiated—forgot to give the harrowing recitals of his Colonial miseries; grew bright, and sometimes even rose to cleverness. He was good-looking too, beyond a doubt, and the pair of them seemed bent on gathering rose-buds whilst they might, quite unaffected by the fact that I stood shivering in the cold.

Luckily, before the recollection of my ills had quite driven me to the suiciding point, Olive, Jack and the veritable Esmond entered, wound up to talk of tennis and the "Glorious Victory" which Olive had achieved, for hours, or for days. To do him justice, Mr. Esmond simply floated on the tide, and really rowed but little. Thanks to his laziness.

As I shall have occasion to mention him quite frequently, I will try and introduce this Englishman (of course we entertained no other nationality at our "residence") at the time I met him first, though I cannot now describe him as he then appeared to me. Conclusions subsequently formed have intermingled quite inextricably with the impressions left at his debut among us.

Tall and compactly made, with shoulders well dressed back, he might have had a military air but for the indolence which permeated him and showed itself in every action, however great or small. Light brown, curly hair, a large, thin Roman nose, a sharply chiselled chin, and light blue eyes (I think the most expressive ones I ever saw), shaded by distinctly pencilled brows of a colour almost black. Such was Mr. Esmond. In any company (or nation he would have passed for handsome. In Winnipeg his looks, together with a knack of dressing well (which would betray itself, even in a country where the costume of a Hottentot would not be looked upon as outré), had gained for him such worship as the gods of old might envy with some reason.

Despite his great advantages, however, he was far too constitutionally tired ever to be priggish, and the "self laudation" quicksand of the colonies would never cause him trouble.

If anyone who reads these lines has travelled in the "West," he or she will bear with me for mentioning this quicksand, which swallows up the best Canadian youth, as well as many of my own poor countrymen who sojourn in that land. I have listened to a so-called conversationalist (my name for him had fewer syllables and a good deal more expression) discussing "What I've done," "Am doing," "Can, could and would do," from 8 p.m. until 11, not a pause occurring long enough to offer him a drink, and not a single opportunity for me to faint arising, though I have fainted dead away a score of times for half the provocation. After that experience I grew a little shy of introductions of their "Men of Society," and even thought the somewhat languid tone of "That very queer chap,

Esmond" better worth the attention one must give to catch the point of his remarks (and point there always was) than the vapid talk of half a dozen would-be blasé boys was worth the trouble and dexterity brought into play in turning yawns to smiles, and groans to exclamations of delight.

During dinner, for which Jack persuaded Mr. Esmond to remain, I could not help devoting a great deal of attention to this (in my opinion, the only prepossessing) one of Jack's familiars, and I saw many things to excite some speculation? How did a young fellow of this calibre take root in Manitoban soil. His was not the mould in which successful farmers or boomster kings are cast. Then immediately came into play that detective principle which is part and parcel of the female system through the world, and which would, did mankind but know us one tithe as well as they flatteringly tell themselves, dispose of ninety-nine per cent. of Earth's inexplicables. Does a woman love a man? Feminine instinct says "Beware, your sex is blessed with eyes, and must, therefore, see that man's good qualities, and, just as naturally, will set traps to catch him." Woman No. 1 will, therefore, watch her swain; write anonymous letters to him; dot down the number of smiles he ventures to bestow on this fair partner, and recollects precisely how many times he dances with the "other one." Jealousy now joins cause with loving Nature, and if the combination does not manage to unearth the blackest, most atrocious of misdeeds before one week after the signing of the compact has elapsed, you may safely risk your life upon it that an imbecile is somewhere within touch.

The curiosity aroused in me (for I have just as much as others of my sex) was somewhat of an antidote to the unsociability which followed on my fit of blues, and when,

a couple of hours after dinner, I found that Mr. Esmond and myself were occupying respective ends of the same small couch, I reduced the intervening space to minimum, and commenced investigations.

We talked of home; discussed the theatres, weather, Colonial and otherwise, and as regards the object of enquiry I seemed doomed to draw a blank. The contact into which I now was brought served only to intensify my first ideas, and made inquisitiveness more acute. He would not come down to "Self." I grew quite desperate, and simultaneously asked of myself and him "Is life worth living?"

He took the question up quite naturally—indeed, he took everything quite naturally, and sleepily as well:—

"Personally, though I hate the rank and file of those who, without rhyme or reason, pose as misanthropes, I do not think it is. The truest wisdom is that which decides upon a course of the utterest inaction. 'To drift' better (to my mind) expresses the highest of existence, than the bustling word of 'life.' The longer we exist—or live—the rottener does everything become. In youth, we see the fairness of the apple, and strive our best to reach it. The result of its attainment is a by-word. The genuine part of Nature, as we see it, is the rasps and saws which constantly and remorselessly wage their warfare on our suffering flesh, from the day when first we see the light to that on which we leave these scenes, for what would be the summit of all bliss, could we but say it was oblivion?"

"Don't you think, Mr. Esmond, that you are just a little too severe?" I ventured to suggest.

"Perhaps I am. My views on this may be (and I can only hope they are) untrue and prejudiced, but the little observation which I have been compelled unwillingly to

“give the matter has resulted in my own conviction that the man who lives the longest sees the most misery. This, however, is called ‘experience;’ and the world will dub him ‘happy,’ forsooth! To my mind ‘happiness,’ a word which mortals should not use, conveys the one idea of utter ignorance in man. Hence, a being without knowledge or a memory would represent ideal happiness attainable on earth.”

A pause of some few moments, during which I tried in vain to gather any clue to test the honesty of this dark cynicism, but all was calm, unruffled and unfathomable. The one expression on the face of him who spoke so bitterly was that of languor.

“I cannot agree in such a theory, Mr. Esmond, and I fervently hope that pure and simple theory it is. Suicide would altogether lose its power of sensation if what you say were fact. Do you never feel a pleasure in excitement? Have there been no moments in your life which you do not wish undone? Why, I can go into a ball-room—good music and the etceteras understood—and enjoy myself in the gaiety and smiles of partners; in the rhythm of music; in a piece of cold chicken and a glass of cool champagne. And I shall never discover that my partners are sneering; that the music is not classical; that the chicken died from unknown but natural causes; or that to call the champagne ‘Gooseberry’ is gross flat-tery. Genuineness itself in each would probably delight me little more. If one decides to enjoy the world, with its faults and all included, standing honestly before it and determining to be comfortable, the earth will bow itself beneath the conqueror’s feet, and he will spend a happy life.”

I had worked up quite a tempest of enthusiasm in myself, and expected a surrender on my opponent's part, but all I got for answer was:—

"I think that if you called these differences of degree 'in misery, we might join hands upon the question of the possibility of earthly happiness, given an education equal to the strain of arriving at the sum of two and two.'"

"According to my views, you give the brutes too great a precedence of man in the strife for mortal bliss," said I. "However, we won't discuss the point a moment longer, but revert to our staunch old friend the weather, shall we?"

"Thank you, Miss Devigne, but I fear the topic is too 'inexhaustible (as well as most exhausting) for the time at my disposal. Some other evening I shall be enchanted to go into it with you, and deal as thoroughly with the subject as we have dealt with 'Life,' but just now I think I must be marching. Good night."

And so he disappeared, leaving me more bewildered and more interested than before. Next night I met him at a boating-dancing party, and followed up my quest. Presently I found that, though formerly I never saw him out, I now stumbled on his path quite frequently. In fact, whenever there was anything going on, there was Mr. Esmond—and I continued studying.

## IX.

"Look here, Nell, no doubt you and Olive are having 'first-rate fun, but does it ever occur to you to think of the pickle which is being prepared for me at the Mater's hands, when she gets to know how things are going on? Now, last night, at the Benton's, I got hold of young Thompson (he's very rich, you know, and told me he was

"dying to be introduced) and skilfully worked him over every square inch of the house, in search of either of you, and all I could discover was that some-quarter of an hour since Esmond and yourself had disappeared in the Conservatory. Everyone could tell me *that*, but there their knowledge ended. Olive was, of course, enjoying the most delightful tête-à-tête with Warwick; looked as if she never met the man before and he was fresh as any traveller to her. This session had, I learnt from others of my knowing friends, demoralised three dances up to then, and, judging from appearances, it bid most fair to outlast the next half dozen." With which our worthy chaperone and brother dabbled the butter at his toast in a way intended to be awe-inspiring, but owing to some carelessness or clumsiness in the execution of the movement, the toast slid off the plate, and the knife came down upon his thumb, besmearing it with butter and threatening the most tremendous gash. Very fortunately, the knife was native to the country, and, like its confrères, harmless, back and front.

"Ha! ha! Jack, that's *very* good. And coming from such saint-like lips, your words must carry weight. Of course, that was a Sanskrit joke which little Mrs. Landon and you were deciphering by holding up against the lamp which stood upon the table in the hall. Judging from the way you greeted *that*, old jokes are not always stale and feeble, especially when (apparently) there's no one within sound or sight. But I had no idea the widow was so deeply read."

This from Olive startled me. It is so rarely necessary for her to act on the defensive (not so much because her actions are *all* irreproachable as because she takes great

care that the good speak for themselves and the bad ones do not readily appear) that at home we all consider her something worse than valueless as advocate: she had so little practice in the learned art.

This time her judgment seemed quite accurate, however, and I hurried to the rescue. If Jack turned stupid (and he had been known to do so) what would become of us? We had a joint cause now for the first time in our memories, thrown upon the remnant of that circle from which we carefully had sifted and attached to our train the only two available male-warming pans.

"What utter nonsense, Jack? To begin with: Have we done more than fall into the customs of the country? As Rome, so Winnipeg. And you surely would not wish us to forswear the one excitement of which the place is capable. Secondly: You know that to think of danger is the wildest of absurdity. Granted that Olive and myself were naturally idiots, I should imagine that it is with extremest difficulty Mr. Esmond (I won't pretend not to understand you) finds the wherewithal to keep himself and his expensive habits. Captain Warwick *may* be an embryo millionaire, but his family has no reputation for their worldly riches, if I remember rightly. His head would certainly not rank too high in the Manitoban market, especially if his heart had been already stolen. Lastly, old boy (most affectionately) you need not think of Mother. I don't consider Olive and myself as likely to bear tales, and there's no one else to do it, unless it be yourself, and I know my brother is incapable of such a thing."

And so he had to go away, having been once more, in his efforts to be proper "clean bowled by those two sisters,"

as he would put the case. He was far from satisfied, I am sure, and, I think, dreaded the developments a good deal more than he would say, though he pretended to be quite convinced that no one in the family could possibly become a fool—notwithstanding some examples to the contrary in no very distant ages—even an uncle who had turned a buxom barmaid into a bride not being allowed the leadership. “De mortuis nil, etc.,” however, becomes the attainments of these gentlemen most aptly, and (as nice people go) we were a very tolerable family indeed.

Mr. Esmond and myself had (there is no use in denying it) become a little necessary to each other. To myself this was readily accounted for by the absence of any other man or thing with which to keep oneself amused. The rest of the small place—the CAPITAL, I mean—edified itself by accounting for what it pleased to call our “curious attachment” in its own funny little way, and I learned from various female sources that we had been engaged some weeks. I forget the date of the engagement, but they knew the very hour of its inception.

This hubbub was becoming somewhat of a nuisance, and I feared that soon I should be compelled to show myself to Mr. Esmond’s view in an icy overcoat, when one morning Jack burst in upon us with the news that “Esmond had gone down to Montreal for the remainder of the winter, it was thought. Gone to see a very wealthy cousin, who has a wealthy sister, too, the fellows say. “Esmond might do worse than marry money, I believe.” After delivering his little budget he disappeared, leaving the projectile to burst and do its work.

’Tis true, one never wants for comforters in time of real distress. Olive addressed herself to my relief at once.

"Never mind, dear. Do you know, I think it just as well that he has gone away before some genuine trouble did occur. I think you grew to like him just a little bit too well."

This looked too much like the ancient battle of the pot and kettle for my appreciation, and I hastily rejoined:

"I am so much obliged for your kind sympathy. Did your philosophy ever stretch so far as to include within its range a case at all resembling that of yours and Capt. Warwick's?"

"Mine and Capt. Warwick's, indeed! I don't mind owning that I do like Capt. Warwick, and consider him very nice and friendly, but you will please observe that beyond the point of friendliness, *our* relations do not go."

Quiet Olive was getting righteously indignant, and I was nervous, irritated, and oh! so unfortunate. No one seemed to care for me, and even in our home I stood alone in misery.

"I do not know—or care to know—what you mean to infer by the majestic emphasis on *OUR*. I never had a friend with whom I sat out six successive dances, as I believe I heard of other people doing."

"And what matter if I sat a dozen out? I thank my stars I'm not affiancée to any man at present. But, should I ever be so, I think I shall possess more feeling for the absent one than some whom I have seen."

"Again I fail to follow you, but this time I should be obliged if you would take the trouble to explain a little for my benefit."

"Nelly! why do you wear that ring upon your finger? Do you think that I am positively blind? I know that Mr. Clifford gave it to you, and if it has no meaning you

"should not wear it so persistently. Oh! Nell, dear, I did not mean to be so cruel."

I had simply given up my consciousness and claimed a little holiday.

According to Fred's wish, I had never moved his ring from off my hand, but by a little artifice (habitually holding the stone within my palm) I hoped to stave off curiosity, and even thought to baffle Olive. But no such luck could be. She made no comment on it, either because she saw the whole from first to last, or else was waiting the initiative from me. The initiative did not come, and Olive formed her own conclusions, which she at length imparted to her sister with very great effect, as has been seen.

How many of Life's horrors I have been spared by my happy knack of fainting it would indeed be difficult to tell. When very young I used to faint at the commencement of a thunderstorm, and thus escape the worst, though such behaviour fearfully-disgusted my dear old governess, who much preferred the lightning to my fits. Growing older, and, to all appearance, strong as possible, I still retained the fainting faculty in its intensity, and when the world refused to run according to my views of what its duty was, I quietly, as Jack used brutally to put it, "keeled over, and left the enemy the undisputed owner of the field, though he always had to buckle to and bring the adversary back to life before he realized a victory."

From such attacks I usually rallied quickly, but on this one occasion recovery was slow, and unconsciousness, departing, left some disagreeables behind. My sleep was troubled with the most horrible of nightmares, the prominent figures in my dreams being always Fred and Mr.

Esmond, invariably bitter foes, and once I thought I saw the latter's mangled corpse, and heard a weeping voice reiterate the one word "Dead," each time with deepening agony, the whole scene being so vivid and ghastly that I screamed aloud, and almost swooned away before I could persuade myself of the picture's unreality.

This and various other oddities of conduct and of disposition, I accounted the effect of hot rooms, confinement, want of exercise and sudden change of climate. Accordingly I devoted great attention to the study of my health; walked much; always rose from table hungry, or thought I did, for I ate so very little. The result was just the same. I went to bed early and got up when I felt inclined (which I found was earlier than my wont); shunned gaiety as Satan's self. Needless to say that within two weeks from the adoption of my hygienic course I felt as if it mattered not how long I sat and ate, I was sure to rise up hungry all the same. Gaiety I avoided sedulously, until I one day overheard "Our Captain" (by which name Capt. Warwick was now known) airing sentiments regarding woman's self-conceit, the love of admiration predominating in her every action, and entirely superseding and supplanting any motives of genuine affection with which she might be born into the world. Though I did not give the gallant captain much credit for originality, attributing the creed a good deal more to Byron (from whom I had upon occasion, when feeling very blue, and needing something disagreeable to ponder, borrowed the very same belief) than to him, I still acknowledged that he made a good quotation. This was, of course, to bring up thoughts of Fred. I had endured some pain on his account of late—a good deal more than any average woman has to bear—and

was the cause of all my trouble any better for it? His vanity might possibly be flattered for a moment, when he should hear of all my wretchedness, but such fleeting ecstasy was dearly bought by what I (the only woman who would dream of doing such a thing) was paying in the coin of misery. Two moments spent in sweet cajolery upon returning home would raise me, in his estimation, far above the pinnacle of any poor and lonely faithful one. I had been, for the last two weeks, hiding all my blaze of glory under a most ignoble bushel of indisposition, and now I felt quite assured that, without debiting to myself anything for flattery, a little trouble spent in the brushing up and buckling on of armour would enable me to reduce male Winnipeg to a point at which I might (with all events as much of justice as could be claimed by the illustrious author of that unintentional satire) exclaim "l'État c'est moi." Though I had no real desire to wrest from the many anxious brows surrounding me the literal crown herein expressed, which, to give honour to those whose due it is, they wore with such good grace and artlessness (?) as to raise no pangs of jealousy in even me.

Whilst I live I shall be impulsive, and to arrive at a conclusion as to the advisability of any course of action, is contemporaneous with the commencement of assault. In this case, the immediate result of my decision was considerably to upset the tempers of sundry of the shop-keepers of Winnipeg, who were tormented by the visits of a maiden unmistakably on war intent, and desperately in want of something "fetching" for the "Soirée Musicale" of the great Lieutenant-Governor that evening, at which the family Devigne was expected to appear more charming than the circumstances (which comprised flat ginger beer

and Methodism) seemed in any way to promise. I own I was much tempted to shock the fine susceptibilities of moral Canada in my most décolleté dress, but prudence intervened, and I decided to keep this delicious morsel of excitement for the wind-up of our term, in the meantime trying to content myself with the further galvanizing of these naturally rigid bodies which surround some festive boards in that model, chilly country, by my "flippant" treatment of their spouses, the utter lack of principle discovered by the way in which I flirted with engaged young men, etc., etc., etc., for a full and true account of which see the Black Books of good Winnipeg, carefully compiled and annotated by——, by——, I forget his name, but someone very prominent and very blue.

### X.

"Blow, ye trumpets! Beat, ye drums! Let all be gay and merry!" This night His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor gives a joyous soirée!

Time was, these *treats* were very scarce indeed, and I hear, from most undoubted lips, that Conscience strove with Manitoba's leader for many months, ere she succumbed to circumstances, and allowed him one short step towards the sociable. This premier pas was musical, and not, of itself, a fall. But, if the art had once the power to draw from Hell's own gate, it also has the power to lead poor mortals down, and (sad, sad case!) ere eighteen months had passed, the faithful gazed in awe and grave amazement. "Our own Lieutenant-Governor gave a dance!" And, sure enough, the holy man had given way some lengths. In one large room the gaudy throng of sinners dared disport themselves *and dance!* Yes, dance! And not a whit

cared they for sacrilege. "But then—" and here the lovers of a "dear Lieutenant-Governor" raised their voice, "Had not the truly good another room to fill?" Why, yes, to be sure they had, all who gathered there owned faces long enough for two, one for the righteous "Me," and one for a wicked counterpart of man, who waltzed and twirled around to suit Damnation's self. What if the Funeral March of Chopin sometimes did break in upon one's dance? Real life is just the same, and none delay to murmur. These satellites of sin just raised the mirth a note, and felt how nice it was to be amongst the bad, with nothing worse to fear and all the work detailed to them to try and make the godly think they've missed a heaven on earth, at least. How difficult a task this is only the righteous know, and to them I leave the question.

The goodly godly simply kept the "even tenor of their way," praised Providence, who gave them better sense than that which makes its owner skip and jump to prove his ecstasy; wondered how on earth an erstwhile solemn Methodist, and a right good prayer, too, could ever hope for heaven's cushioned seats and still abet this heathen immorality.

For divers good and all sufficient reasons, however, it came to pass at length that the dancing herd were entertained alone—when all was wickedness and death. At other times a Musicales was given, and here the righteous flocked by scores. Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregationalist; and, sometimes, Church of England, mingling with the saintly band. C. of E., however, must always show some special cause for entrée to the set. Sometimes it lay in certain pious acts. At others—well, I draw no inference, but true it is that the crowd of would-be suicides which filled

the City Police Court as surely as the morning rose succeeding these gay parties was Episcopalian to a single man. I am inclined to think that our creed was known to be the Anglican, but other people said we owed our invitation (for we had never called upon the Governor) simply to acquaintance with "Sir John" (meaning Sir John Macdonald), and therefore Paradise itself should open to our eyes.

Be that as it may, there we were, in nice, symmetric rows. On my right sat a long-haired, long-eared parson, with accents truly harrowing. Had I been in his charge, I should never have known wrong. Those tones would kill the devil. Every word he spoke seemed to be his last. But this appearance was of the usual sort, and disappointment dire and dark awaits the lover of the brief whose hopes are raised thereby.

On my left I had a vacant chair, from which I challenged sympathy, and got it, too, for it absolutely stretched itself upon the floor, with overwhelming grief—and some few pounds of Manitoba meat—when a certain well-known gentleman would fain have made it his, preparatory to addressing me with one of his famous, sometimes prosy, always lengthy, dissertations upon Manitoba and that "grand country's" prospects.

The leading spiritual comforter having mentally numbered the aristocratic crowd, canvassed the most prominent, and placed them on the tablets of his memory for a "call," retired to a corner and indulged in silent meditation for a season. No further shrieks from dauntless A. D. C., occasioning a rampage of the brain for what was possible in English patronymic, a perfectly congenial hush fell on the saintly crowd, and I sat in expectation that "Five minutes silent prayer" would be announced. CRASH! And

every mouth was open to its full extent. Jabber, jabber, jabber, for five minutes, by the clock; then the death-like silence came again. The first piece of our Musicale was gone.

One gallant Aide perceived the "long felt want" and flew upstairs with speed which Love in vain might emulate, returning laden with "the neatest thing in placards," as he said. Each measured some eighteen inches long by ten in breadth, and in the finest, squarest type displayed the following request:—

"GUESTS MUST NOT TALK WHILST THE PIECES  
ARE BEING PLAYED."

With this fine legend the principal mirror, most prominent screens and every point of vantage immediately blazed, and awe and horror fell upon the gathering.

This royal mandate was certainly too hard. The people's one great inspiration lay in really classic music—it formed their very speech, and when it stopped, as social beings, they died.

I glanced around, in fear, expecting nothing but collapse or a rebellion. The fine old Governor rose to the occasion. His classic organ (the feature of his face, I mean, no Wagner breathing instrument), smelt danger on the wind. The hunt for votes, popularity and place is a wondrous sharpener of these same nasal nerves, and tactless politicians are too much loved by gods to trouble mortals long. One word to an attendant and the obnoxious card was gone—relegated to the history of the past, and the memory of all present, in whose minds it burnt, one livid spot of rage, and vengeance for the insult reigned supreme in every pious heart.

For two long weeks the unhappy A. D. C. knew not what existence meant, unless it were a pitchforking from one thorn to another. Why will repentance always come too late, and prick and spur one on when every hope is past? This poor young man was quite a "masher," too, and the disastrous *contretemps* so utterly abased him that even his most favoured fair—with whom he filled one narrow sleigh for hours, two days previously—would now hardly look upon him (or that was the impression which she meant to be conveyed, for, owing to a certain "piquancy of eye," the wretched man might readily be pardoned for any slight mistake )

But let us hasten back to our merry-making, which, after the bill-posting episode, appeared to flag a little, despite the unexampled efforts of our good old Hostess. Yes, there is a Hostess, too, and one who makes a picture perfectly unique, from which a painter might, if sufficiently inspired by his art, reap fortune in one sheaf. As the portrait of "A Hostess," it would set the world agog. By the terrible calamity of inefficient—not insufficient—ears, this lady has lived divided from us all so long that interest in our actions could not but be utterly absurd, and to strike the rock of ridicule would sink a Governor's wife. But, ever on the alert to merit praise, this dire misfortune has been turned to good account, and real, well-bred indifference to all her guests may do has triumphed over what, in others, might be purely frightful. 'Tis true, there is a sort of dull, misleading look, apart from well portrayed *ennui*, which inexperienced people have been heard to say expressed nought more refined than the wish to go to bed. But that, of course, is too outrageously absurd. The lady of a real Lieutenant-Governor desire to leave an atmosphere im-

pregnated with "Sweet Tschaikowsky's notes!" In the country's own vernacular, "Not much!"

The average new comer could hardly be expected to discover the tremendous heights and depths of this fine character. I, however, being somewhat quick in my recovery from the effects of dazzling brilliancy, soon overcame such disadvantages, and, when I really grew to understand, my admiration was intense. This well considered habit simplified communication to the last degree, so that we said, one word more, "That's volumes over-much," one word less, "We did not speak to-day." Would that the common people knew what goes to make a Governor's wife!

I should be guilty of the gravest misdemeanour did I omit to mention the daughters of this rare old family, who so nobly bear themselves (the daughters), and so well appreciate the beauty and attractiveness of utter abnegation that the casual visitor hunts for them in vain. But, should he accidentally come upon their stand, he will indeed have great surprise, and from that time will mark the corner well.

So much for the Governor and his family, whose most ordinary features are somewhat hard to reproduce, be it never so imperfectly—and whose peculiarities would tax an abler pen. To talk of their surroundings, tastes and rules, the people who compose that "Light which beats about a throne," I leave to some St. Simon, or, failing so congenial a chronicler, some native-born Munchausen, of whom the country boasts a plentiful supply—indeed, the increase seems to be so very far ahead of any home demand that the one great question is, "What *can* become of all the surplus stock?" And then we think of Manitoban farms,

the great demand for honest immigration men, and the problem disappears. Well, some day, by means of this fine talent, which far out-rivals all their vegetable world (and that is heavy praise) the *οι πολλοι* who know not Winnipeg, shall see the very faces of these grand Consérvatives. Until then, I fear the veil must stay. The ire of gods would light upon my sacrilege were I but to attempt to brush the cloud away.

Of the people who attend these *Musicales*, however, and whom the glory of "prime favourite" does not envelope, I must, *en passant*, say a little more.

About the room, where all the time I had been sitting painfully aware of smothered wrath on every side (I say "painfully" advisedly. Did you ever see a farce enacted, *sub rosa* during service in a church?) were scattered small and serious looking groups. The stately, proud old Methodists, all evidently conscious of their high positions midst that mob, arranged themselves most statuesquely, and broke the hallowed silence with no word. The unhappy Church of England people disconsolate, afraid and longing for those doors (they lead into the dining-room) to give the signal for a dash, made the most abortive of attempts to look as if they were (where each one fain would be) at home.

But hush! (Since the placard incident one could hear quite a little music, and what a treat it was!) A dapper, silky-haired young man was hammering off Mozskowsky, *au* himself, and wonderfully well he did succeed (in rendering himself——) as just one-half the audience admitted. The other half, of course, "Really did not know." In which confession they were very honest, and should have put their fellow-men to shame, but, wonderful to say (of course the light was bad, and I am perhaps maligning some

of the most sensitive) I did not see a solitary blush. On the contrary, the want of unanimity appeared to be vexatious, and a little altercation near to me, occasioned by an enthusiast's retort to the stereotyped "Don't know" (which took the form of a somewhat bursque, but, I understand, most gentlemanly expression of an incredulity as to the agnostic's ownership of that knowledge which is requisite for pounding sand), I feared would end in blows. But no! Though Mendelssohn knew nothing, and Wagner was a beast, their differing disciples, at all events, knew what was what, would always keep the peace, and show such sweet forbearance as I could scarce call human, though I own a poor, weak woman's heart.

Hemmed in on every side by musical discussion (the one point kept in view appeared to be the name, Leschetizsky, Scharwenka, Tschaikowsky and Mozskowsky, from all that I could understand, were leading favourites), I was fast becoming dizzy, when a distinguished looking, antique man, whose collar knew not starch, with hair which waved triumphantly in every breeze, whose very voice was quavers, asked if I "would care to see the library?"

I would, with infinite relief, on this particular occasion, have accompanied any well conducted Chimpanzee to gaze upon the inmates of a monkey-house, and have listened most attentively to his harangue upon our common relatives. There cannot be much wonder, then, that I jumped at this gentleman's proposal. No, I don't mean to say I "jumped," that is a pure and simple figure, for had I dared to even move without at once adopting the graceful "Manitoba Mince," my partner would have fainted on the spot, and Elysium have faded from my view.

By dint of skilful handling and good tact, I managed

things so nicely that we found ourselves ensconced within a corner of the library which would have been a Godsend to a spooney couple. Plants in front of us; plants to right of us; plants to left of us, and plants——but I must not anticipate.

In this quiet nook it was my heart's desire to get a little snooze, under cover of a rapt attention, and wake to life again when the uproar of the supper should begin. But the fates were unpropitious, having previously cursed me and my partner, by bestowing on him at his birth (a hundred years ago), a voice pitched, as nearly as I possibly could calculate, in the very highest G. Of this thoughtless gift of heaven he made abundant use to confound the brave musicians, whose different masters had performed that feat so thoroughly that he could but make "confusion worse confounded." Nevertheless, it seemed to ease him very much to call them "cranks." And, having got so far, he must go farther and describe the pain and agony and bliss which music was to him. Beethoven was "divine." He "felt the power in his chest, a never failing sign of excellence." (He hadn't touched a bite for hours, I'm prepared to swear, and had I been in his place, the symptom would have been proclaimed beneath a less æsthetic name than "Beethoven.")

It is highly probable that I should still be occupying my position, and, like "Old Tommy Day, all dead and tanned to clay," but that I became afflicted with those tortures of the damned which only the acutest pins and needles can produce, and such an extreme evil calling for some remedy equally extreme, by a very dexterous movement with my fan, I managed to lodge the contents of a rather pretty hanging basket down that old savant's neck.

Just then, and as my handkerchief was all but down my throat, I heard a scuffling, scrambling, rushing sound, and dragging my somewhat earthy, but still discursive specimen of Music's power away, came upon the once majestic, and now happy, throng struggling for an entrance to the room where, people said, a supper was laid out. I fought. My virtuoso fought. We kicked. We pushed. And, finally, we conquered! The earthly heaven was here; and down we sat, determined to do some execution *now*, for there might be no morrow. (The doors were still besieged, and what is there that starving people will not do for bread?) I ate—ate everything (particulars of which I know not), and drank some very excellent, year old lemonade. My vulgar little brother would, of course, have called it "pop;" but what won't vulgar little brothers do?

At twelve o'clock, however, by order of the Governor, we left. Some odious people said that they felt tired. I should have liked to stay one half hour more to see whether, for that short length of time, these gentlemen and ladies could have kept their heads—the upper parts, I mean, for many of them have really good-sized mouths (a lady informed me, confidentially, that "Old Miss Tompkins, over there, had just a hinge to hold her head together. If she yawns a little more, the top will fall behind her back, and James will have to put it into place again"); and who knows but some spiteful Manitoban draught might blow, and then what would occur? The possibilities were frightful, and, as I thought of them that night, I yawned myself, and fell asleep. Mind you don't do the same, reader.

## XI.

"Once upon a time, you must know, when England's Navy was working those 'Thrice famous deeds' of which the poet speaks, two gentle, loving, jolly British Tars agreed, and sealed the compact with "Old Tom"—how much deponent leaves in doubt—that, heedless of misfortune's course, in love or fight, both Jacks would stick together. Luckily, no trial of their faith in the first named of these contingencies appeared, but fighting was as sure to come as Destiny; and one bright summer morning—I would give the date and minute, but know how thoroughly the fair sex hate all figures—a thundering Johnny Crapaud drew in sight, and very soon, where all was peace and harmony, Old Nick would scarce have liked to call himself at home. The fight had reached the worst, and still our Jack and Bill stood side by side, and always worked together. But, sad to say, the careless cherub up aloft moved his eye, and threw a sidelong glance upon the French. In that short space poor Jack lost both his legs. 'I'm done for, Bill. My legs is hoff. Just carry me below.'"

"Oh, that be blowed; I've seed yer lose your legs afore. You'll be all right directly." Saying which Bill put the poor chap on his back and started for the hatch; but, just as he was going down, and quite without his knowledge, some chain-shot cleaned off Jack's red head. Bill, unaware of this, the unkindest cut of all, keeps on his way, and coming to the cockpit, drops the helpless trunk. 'Just look to poor old Jack, Sir; he needs attention bad,' says he.

"'He needs a good deal more attention than I've got time to give,' replies the surgeon. 'What do you mean, Bill Thompson, by bringing corpses here?'"

“‘Oh, his legs is gone, that’s all, Sir. He’ll come round all right.’

“‘Legs! You fool; he’s lost his head in action for once and all this time. Take him away.’

“Jack turned about with some surprise, and saw how matters stood.

“Well, well, old chap. You’ve gone at last. But ‘you always were the d——dest liar.’ (To the Doctor, ‘pointing his thumb towards the dead): ‘He swore it were ‘his legs.’”

“Conyers, how dare you draw on ancient history so ‘sacrilegiously?’” And a snow ball sent my *raconteur* racing for his tuque.

Since the *Musical* referred to in my last preceding chapter the months had sped along, and mid-winter had arrived. The art of snowshoeing had now no mysteries for those “wild English girls” (it is not so *very* difficult, despite the tales the elder ones will tell to frighten you) and this was one of our moonlight tramps, a species of enjoyment of which I soon grew fond.

Mr. Conyers, a passable young man, though much too dark to suit my taste (I never did like swarthy men—they are so sinister)—had affected my society with some assiduity of late; in fact, his *entrée* dated from the time when I resolved to return to that tremendous whirl of gaiety which those who live in Winnipeg alone can understand.

He was, when Jack came down upon us, trying very very hard to beguile away the time which would, in my opinion, have been much better occupied in studying the beauty of the night, which was actually enchanting. However, as he had done what he considered duty in my cause, I could not but attempt to champion him.

"Why, Jack, *I* never heard the story in my life before. Besides, the sailors are such pets of mine that tales of them are welcome any time."

"Yes, so I understand from Olive. Headless ones, especially. Conyers, you should know better than to rake such tender feelings up. This damsel once was gone upon a dapper little yachtsman. The public said that he was headless, too."

This was another evidence of sisterly affection. I had hardly flirted with the man at all, and yet Olive could remember all about it—and relate a good deal more.

"As far as I know anything of human nature, it is a common thing for men to lose their heads when once their heart is gone. The object of this adoration often saves, for general utility, enough of head and heart for both," said Mr. Conyers.

"That quite explains it all," said I. "I never thought it out before. That must account for all girls over two years old being so much brighter than their brothers. Instance the gross stupidity of this incubus of sin." With which I fell upon that brother with what he insisted was a "fall of snow," though I am quite convinced the snowball was as hard as any brick, but, naturally, it splintered on his head. However, with one of my fierce glances, so justly called "divine," that young man withered or dried up, and for full three minutes no person broke the spell created by the magic beauty of the scene.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, with steady, military stride our trio marched along. The crispness of the air, the clearness of the night, and the brilliancy of the stars and moon, all struck me as sublime. Every spoken word should be true poetry, sounding, as it did, amongst the trees, round the

turns, and far away over the spotless snow which covered the imperfections of old Mother Earth with skill that put to shame the modern model statesman, cloaking his empty nutshell of a breast with diplomatic ice.

That pretty scene of banks and woods and boundless prairie, the only beings visible the gay and ghostly (if such a paradox may be allowed) forms of others on the tramp, and these so rarely seen (pairs always), and then evincing such retiring habits as very much to heighten one's idea of a northern fairyland. The appearance of an Ice Queen would just complete the thought. The reindeer, with the silver tinkle of their bells, and a diamond powdering of snow upon their coats, would meet you round the turn, you quite expected.

But no! 'Twas true, it was but Earth, and what we ran against, with some unnecessary force, was a common, vulgar, horrid barbed wire fence, which stopped our material selves and brought us down to fact remorselessly. A short cut (why will the world persist in taking them?) had drawn this fate upon us, not content with the valley of Assiniboine, we must attempt a new and direct course, which brought us up in front of an obstruction more fatal than the Irish, and quite as barb-arous (ahem!) The men got over this with great *éclat*. Placing the stomach pit upon a post, gracefully elevating their snow-shoed feet as if to take a header down below, a dexterous (but, I imagine, peace destroying) twist, a careful flop, and shoes and all were over. But how about myself? On some account (mere prejudice, most likely) the somersault *divertissement* seemed open to objection. I felt that as a snow-shoe steeple-chaser I was about upon a par with that very fine old fox-hunter, who, coming to a stiffish looking fence, shouted to



an urchin loitering on the other side "Hey, boy. Is there a ditch on your side?" "Naw, Sir," says the lad. "Then down with that d—d fence, and let me have a shot at it."

But my grinning idiot of a brother seemed to enjoy my plight, whilst Mr. Conyers looked diligently (but most unsuccessfully) "for a plank," he said. Glancing up and down the fence, I saw a somewhat lower part, with a wooden bar on top, and, resolved not to be beaten, I found my way to this. In England, I'm not so very bad at vaulting, and do not stand on ceremony with a five-barred gate. So, wrapping my dress around my "lower limbs," and placing both feet as near together as I could, I gave my finest jump—and, somehow, I am not prepared to say "with care," I reached the other side, but whether those two men enjoyed the joke, or not, I cannot tell. I do not tramp across the country now, and Manitoban days are gone forever.

At my suggestion, we now made for the river. I felt quite certain of immunity from fences there. Walking on the bank until we reached a slide, we then, as to the manner born, sat down upon our snowshoes and tobogganed down the hill. A little further on we found a prostrate log, which, being near the bank, and having a magnificent canopy of over-hanging snow, invited us to rest our weary selves from the too terrible exertions of the tramp, and remove the cakes now forming on our shoes and becoming large enough to make themselves extremely disagreeable through even three thick stockings and a mocassin.

"I wonder where those two have lost themselves *this* time," I said, more as a break in the silence than with any view to eliciting a reply, for, of late, "those two" (by which collective Capt. Warwick and Olive were rather widely known) had strayed away so often that I, for one,

and Jack, who once was positively savage, for a second, were now too tired to interest ourselves again.

Mr. Conyers mumbled comfort from the bottom of his throat, and Jack, not having heard, agreed. Silence for three minutes more, and then, as if consensus of opinion had penetrated even his thick skull, Jack rose and thought he would look round the bend and see where Olive actually was. Mr. Conyers and myself remained behind, evidently sympathetically tired, and soon began to thaw beneath the rays of "Yon pale moon." Poetically our conversation moved from moon to sun, thence easily to Love.

"Miss Devigne; what is a true flirtation?"

This looks quite promising for an illustration, at all events, thought I, but said :

"Well, Mr. Conyers, from my small outside view, I feel inclined to say of it as some man did of Love—'The currency of falsehoods between two persons differing in sex, which man and man or woman and woman would laugh to utter scorn.' More briefly told, flirtation is but mutual flattery."

"And what do you call Love?" said my sentimental youth.

"In man or woman?"

"In woman, of course. I know what it is in man, to my most bitter sorrow."

Tragedy, too, beneath this man's "top-coat." His face was certainly uncanny, in spite of its good looks.

"Well, my love-lorn friend, I believe the '*Grande Passion*' in woman is (when her first love has died its natural death of disappointment, and left its legacy of disbelief) a simple thirst for masculine adoration like nothing but the craving of a drunkard for his one infatu-

"ation. That sentiment is one of those stray truths which Byron scattered through his works with such a niggard hand. But tell me of your blighted hopes. You don't know what wonders I can work in my small way. I even think that I could minister to *some* minds which are diseased."

This was growing quite pathetic, and, though I knew my risks so well, the Devil pushed me on and on; took off my mitten; toyed with the snow in such dangerous proximity to Mr. Conyers that he was forced to stroke my hand. And all without rebuke! Such is the effect of snow-shoeing upon the heart.

"I don't doubt your *ability* to work a perfect cure," said he; "but are not those ideas upon the subject of your sex's constancy somewhat cynical for a thorough doctor of my malady?"

"Oh, I should never dream of curing you entirely. Such incidents are by far too scarce to be rashly blotted from the mind. I would just apply a little caustic to the wound; shew that of fish there is a plenty in the sea; and soon you would forget you ever had a love—except, of course, your inner man, which they will continue to propitiate before all else as long as men exist."

In spite of this most shockingly materialistic view of the excellencies of his sex, his hand had crept upon my own, and he said:

—"I don't need caustic, Miss Devigne, nor do I ask for pity, but if I dared to hope that at some future time—not so *very* far away, you——"

"Oh, Mr. Conyers! Do you see that squirrel? Isn't it a dear?"

The little beast had most opportunely brought himself and tail within a yard or two of where we sat.

Mr. Conyers, who looked upon this last addition to our party as decidedly *de trop*, grumpily responded :

"As far as my most limited acquaintance with the brute creation goes, the animal we see is a squirrel, pure and simple, and very simple, too. A deer would certainly 'have had more *savoir faire*:' picking up a piece of frozen snow and throwing it at our poor visitor with a force that would have stunned an ox—if it had hit him.

"Poor little fellow! You've frightened him away. 'Why did you do that?'" I took the part of the oppressed with more alacrity than is my wont—from motives not unmixed, I fear.

"Because he seemed to me a most unwelcome guest, and interrupted what I had to say, which was this: I love you, Miss Devigne. Not in the way which you hold 'natural, but as my ideas of how a man should love commend—with all my heart; with all my soul. I never loved a woman until now, and you surely can—I know you must—feel how real my passion is. I have sometimes allowed myself to think that, in a woman's way, you almost reciprocated—(painful pause)—but perhaps I was mistaken. In any case, I hope you will forgive my 'putting it to the touch' so brusquely, and tell me what my chances 'are?'"

Here was another of the usual *contretemps*. What idiots these Lords of all Creation really are! Of course this man commenced his downward course most willingly, possibly with cool deliberation to have a few pleasant months, and joke with me *pour passer le temps* alone—and had he nailed those colours to his mast all would have been plain sailing for us both until some better, newer game arrived. But he must needs progress with giant strides,

and call himself "in Love," and deem the one way out (as it is the quickest, most sure and disillusionizing) to be through Hymen's gate. It really was too bad; and left no remedy but downright quarrelling. I saw the "Friends forever" was no go.

"If you are thinking, Nelly dear," (byplay, decidedly repellant on my part) "what my worldly prospects are—and such thoughts would be most natural—I may say that although they are not splendid, they are fair, and Fortune so far favours me that my wife need never fear the thorns of poverty."

It was evidently time that the farce drew to its close, and so, steadying my voice and making every effort to seem cool, I said:

"Excuse me, Mr. Conyers, but you have very much misjudged me, and cannot be aware of my engagement, otherwise, I think you would have spared me this."

"Good God!" said he, springing to his feet, "Engaged! I beg a thousand pardons, Miss Devigne. I have really, up to now, never placed the very smallest faith in your betrothed's existence. Something in your manner—your apparent disbelief in love, or anything sincere, and—a murdered man should be allowed to speak before the breath departs—the thorough way in which you carry this creed out, argued so forcibly against the tale; and if what you say is really true, this slight peculiarity excites the deepest pity of my soul for your unsuspecting lover."

It is my turn now, and rising slowly to my feet—though every drop of blood within my veins seems tingling, and I can *feel* the glisten of my eyes, I said:

"Mr. Conyers. From the gentlemanly, courtly manner of your speech, it is evident that you have followed me

"to-night with a deliberate intention to insult"—Crack!  
 —My speech came to a most effective and unexpected close, which far surpassed whatever I could contemplate at the richest moments of a fertile and not untrained imagination. I hope that when the time arrives for me to "shuffle off this mortal coil" I may do it with some small portion of that feeling of relief which rushed upon me as I subsided into what, to all appearance, was my grave. In this short passage of our arms, I saw a look in Mr. Conyers' face which was, to say the least, decidedly unpleasant; it dwelt upon my mind for many days, and the occasion when once more it thrust itself upon my notice will be a dark spot in the course of life as long as that stream rolls for me.

But stay; I said that Mr. Conyers and myself were in a common grave. Yes, and so we were, and the resurrection which you will naturally suppose occurred (otherwise how could I plague you thus?) was ushered in by a peal of fiendish laughter, interrupted now and then by a most disgusted "Ugh!" which sounded (and actually was) immediately upon us. A superhuman effort, pushing, kicking and struggling generally, in all directions at one time, and I discovered that my head was free and I could breathe the air. My partner in misfortune had likewise fought the battle back to life, and when we turned to find the cause of our disaster, there it, or rather he (Jack), was, with snowshoes high in air, and the most woe-begone of faces, evidently quite prepared to welcome anything which promised change—even the appearance of the demons upon whose nest he lucklessly had fallen. I blessed him in my own sweet way, and in my heart of hearts beheld him as the angel which his entrance from above would naturally suggest. My amatory friend, I fear, saw the intrusion in

another light, though he tried his best to laugh the matter off.

The truant pair whose actions were accountable for all this wild confusion now stood upon the bank and went through antics worthy of the best contortionists in endeavouring to suppress what seemed to be an imminent explosion.

The explanation of it all was this: Jack, in going back along the river, had met the couple some distance round the bend, and, moved by that base love of others' agony which saturates all male humanity and occasionally, as in the present case, meets its own reward, had seduced them into trying that short-cut where I so narrowly escaped humiliation (how Olive got across the wire fence I never could find out) and then my gentle brother, who allowed good nature to so far get the better of him as to walk some yards in front, had come upon the river bank a little higher up than where we three so gracefully slid down, the Fates of course directing him to jump upon the overhanging snow which formed the pretty roof, and very nearly pall, of Mr. Conyers and myself, on whose unsuspecting guiltless heads it and its burden immediately came down, with the result which has been told, and which a most crude sketch, by Olive (who says she couldn't rectify a line for laughing), pretends to represent.

We did not waste much time in tramping home, and my art of management was such that our group of five contained that number always. A hot and hearty supper put Olive, her double and even Jack on the very best of terms with outside things, but, somehow, Mr. Conyers and myself did not readily recover from the dire effects of what the others called our "Sitting on." Thanks to the exertions

of our walk, however, all troubles and excitements faded into slumber and a vivid dream of England and of Fred. I woke next morning feeling comparatively well, a state which rapidly increased to the superlative when I heard Jack say that "Conyers has received bad news from Ottawa and starts for there to-night." I forthwith shelved the "dear departed" with the past, and prayed fervently that Providence would keep him "Down below" (Canadian term for Ontario or Quebec) until the Atlantic rolled between America and me.

## XII.

The event was the "Charity Ball," and all Winnipeg, decent and indecent, mustered at the never threadbare cry of "General Hospital."

The place (the Drill Hall) festooned with flags of all Nations, ever-greens and shining arms, really looked (as these accessories will make a dungeon) quite pretty. The dancing square, in the centre of the Hall, as if not, of its unassisted self, dangerous enough to be exciting, was covered by four cannons, one standing at each corner—characteristically typical of Winnipeg. People of the ordinary world consider *walking* to the cannon's mouth no constitutional. To dance before a battery would seem to be amongst the rare delights reserved for strong North-Western nerves.

Ranged round the Hall were little anti-rooms; now prettily and (infinitely better) cosily arranged to accommodate a couple or four persons (but never an odd number) whose ideas, running in like channels, made them wondrous kind, deaf and sightless.

As compared with balls at home, some improvements were here visible. Wall-flowers there were none to see:

Chaperones but few, and those few young and jolly, having something much more interesting to attend to than the careful handling of reins demanding such manipulation as those which should restrain a maiden. Husbands of the true old-fashioned type would find no place in this fine, fresh land, where "*Honi soit qui mal y pense*" is a motto for actual adoption, and not worn on garters only. When man here takes unto himself a wife, it is with the assumption that both may, in time thereafter, enjoy themselves a little—youth, ability and opportunity permitting. This arrangement struck me as marvellously well devised; and the results are so enjoyable all round that, but for one or two small obstacles (a slight one being the connubial yoke-fellow's absence; a larger one, the doubt about the length of time beyond the honey-moon to which good-fellowship may be spun out, before closing, in the orthodox old way, with a "*Decree Nisi*" of the Court) I would have plunged into the Benedictine throng, and hoisted up my pennon with a scroll to "*Live for Life, and be at Peace with all Men.*"

In this Colonial ball-room might be seen men of all degrees hobnobbing with that crowd which belongs distinctively to none: the younger son of a peer drank "*Whiskey straight*" with—and to give the poor devil his due, generally at the expense of—the butcher's son, and neither was demoralized. Someone says that were impossible. I don't dispute; I simply write the fact.

These younger sons have often histories; and the birth of each one is not registered with that degree of accuracy which such occurrences would seem (in the eyes of an unsuspecting public) to demand. The chronicle of many of the people gathered in that room would make quite

startling tales. The world's failures shake the hands of the success of trade and hardihood, and both are gratified—one tangibly, the other by some sops to vanity—for faded aristocracy is not the despicable thing the sordid would be willing to believe, and so much blood for so much bacon is even yet a common mode of reckoning.

How is it that the gayest and giddiest of people (amongst whom I generally class myself) do often moralize in scenes which to the looker-on appear so full of mirth and happiness as to preclude the slightest possibility of thought? Because we assume a laughing, bright exterior, they say we cannot think. Do none of these fine, cynical philosophers ever calculate the concentration of ideas which is necessary to produce that empty air? The sheer determination to enjoy where actual enjoyment cannot be? Of all the people present at that ball, how many (who own to twenty years) amuse themselves? They whirl and whirl and whirl, and in the giddiness will lose themselves; or they eat and eat and drink, and in repletion will forget themselves; but, outside of the veriest tyros, they none of them enjoy. Do I forget the dress? Oh no! I bear it all in mind. The understandings of a man, 'tis true, declare to him that woman lives in dress. He reckons nothing for the painful consciousness of that little ribbon being out of place, and Mrs. Simmons having got "her eye on it." *He* has no corsage to be cut too low; no train to be entangled in an idiotic spur. These are trials which call for the fortitude of woman to endure, backed up by the spirit and decision to dress for self (and the men, of course), alone, regardless of the spite of rival or of friend. On the whole, I do not place much faith in costume as a panacea for all the female ills.

But meanwhile, all *looked* bright; and we will now descend from our moral rostrum in time to lose nothing that may serve as antidote to untimely lucubration.

Olive was at her very best, in a beautiful concoction of her own device, and the amount of drilling which her dressmaker received should make her end her days in thankfulness that the English do not really overrun the American continent to the extent which has been represented. For myself, the mirror—there is no such thing as a pier-glass anywhere; but, judging from a view made piecemeal, I feel that even yet I am not quite repulsive, despite *mauvais quarts d'heures*, from which of late I have been constantly emerging. My life has latterly appeared but one long explanation. Explanation by post to Fred, who “ventured to suggest that I should write a little oftener, and put more in my letters,” inferring, too, that the few lines I vouchsafed seemed wanting in that yearning note which he would fain detect, and to which he evidently thought he was entitled as a perquisite.

Explanation to Jack, who declared that I was “positively heartless.” Heartless! I, heartless; whose life has been one long struggle to escape the consequence of too soon excited feeling. Finally, explanations to a baker’s dozen of men, who had the cool effrontery to call themselves entitled to apology, if I but dared to appreciate a view of which they did not constitute the vanishing point. Ah! here comes a wondrous specimen of what is possible in the greenest of green youth. Which, I wonder, is the more objectionable, green old age, or really verdant youth. Truthfully speaking, I think that I prefer the mellowed article. Wilful idiocy has more patent charms, and is capable of at least *some* unexpected turns, which the sim-

pering, white-haired, callow little fool, who is prancing up to me just now, could never dream about. I am forcibly reminded of some badinage between two boys which I heard a day or two before. "Tom," says Pope embryo, "I believe if an original idea struck you, you'd die of fright, right off." And, cruel as it may appear, I wish that some original idea would just experiment on this *bête noire* of mine, who imagines that he apes the English *à merveille* though as yet he has progressed no further than the ape, and much I fear that Nature intends him there to stay.

"How d'ye do, Miss Devigne? Very hot already, isn't it? Wonder what on earth it *will* be like before the thing is over."

"It would not be quite proper for a lady to attempt the simile, would it, Mr. Chesney? But you strong-minded, brutal men have words which appear to put the situation in a nutshell (ahem!)"

My "strong-minded" youth smiles a knowing smile and settles down to the proper *blasé* cast of countenance, simultaneously and wittily remarking that there was but one woman worth a glance in that "mixed crowd." After which he took a seat beside me, smirked as who should say "Now, isn't that a neat one?" at the same time leaning back with a look of satisfaction which tells me too plainly that in calculating for a conversation *he* may be counted out. So, in desperation, I rushed in again.

"Pray, where is this gay butterfly who has woven such a web?—(by the bye, do butterflies weave webs?) Never mind, this is a Manitoban, and, therefore quite unique, and she has evidently woven one strong enough to entangle *you*, who have passed through so many sieges quite unscathed, apparently; her net's material will,

"therefore, need but little praise. Come, now; tell me where she is, and how such victories can be gained. I may need the experience some day, though I should never dare attempt a fortress so impregnable as that which you "set up."

The silent spell is evidently broken. The machinery is started, and conversation (ye gods, forgive me!) now flows like a river. Loves, doves, angels and bangles, mixed in inextricable confusion, simply gallop one another down, as the Talleyrand of his day lays out his stock in trade, places me to his colossal credit with the mental comment "Another mash, by Jove!—what a thing is this personal magnetism," and finally marches off to reproduce his wares to another customer, with an effect as killing as before. Deserted by my cavalier, I ventured to address a few remarks to one of Mrs. Grundy's monitors, who sat upon my right, but, inadvertently, and most indiscreetly, using, in the course of conversation, the oldest fashioned term descriptive of the two appendages by which rude Nature has sustained what brave men dare to call our "trunks" (I wonder whom I'm shocking now!) this worthy chaperone (first looking everywhere, to ensure no male attendance, and evidently fearful lest some breeze should bear the sentence to an outraged native ear, then, glancing upon me with the amused peculiar smile, usually worn when gazing on a somewhat shocking picture, in a nice retired place) said:—

"We don't use "leg" in Canada."

With the utmost *sang froid* possible I sat, despite a fiendish temptation to use my "legs" once again, for the very best of Nature's purposes, viz.: to rapidly increase the distance dividing me and the occasion of my fright. Over-

coming this desire, however, my disposition was to kick, and this was so intensely strong that, but for the timely intervention of a very gouty toe, the Drill Shed floor would still bear holey witness to my agony. But the kindly action of this well-fed foot proved of the greatest service, and when peace assumed her normal sway (which comfortable state was thoughtlessly delayed by the owner of aforesaid foot), Jack was bearing down upon me, the famous Mr. Compton, tall, dark and sombre-looking, with the *laissez-aller* air of a successful "agonizing" masher, by his side.

"Good evening, Miss Devigne. Have you still anything for an adorer? I have been searching everywhere, but you don't seem to frequent the too much travelled portions of the hall, and I dare not penetrate to *all* the little nooks and crannies, for fear of getting a broken head in one of them, not to speak of the grunts and black looks which always do greet single-handed trespassers."

"Ah, Mr. Compton, I kept that dance (a quadrille which had been reserved as a "duty" for poor Jack) especially for you. I don't *dance* quadrilles, you know. Was it not good of me to deal so tenderly with you, in spite of the conviction that would creep over me that you would again resort to the horrid little trick you played on me the other night," (on which occasion I had disappeared in darkness with a more congenial friend at the approach of Mr. Compton's dance, only reappearing to to visit thunder on the errant knight.)

"Yes. Indeed, the action showed your natural goodness, though I, of course, deny the accusation you so unjustly hurl at me. I should have been prostrated at your feet long, long ago, but for the difficulty in finding

“you at first, and when at length I did behold the vision  
 “I had sought so long, I also saw, to bring me to the  
 “things of earth, young Chesney paying court, and you  
 “evincing an overwhelming interest in the man. Then  
 “suicide lost all its horrors, and fain would I have gained  
 “the Peace I seek beneath the waters of the muddy “Red,”  
 “but Sympathy declared that at the hands of Chesney you  
 “must inevitably die, though in opposition to all human  
 “laws, on account of too much breath, and so I pressed  
 “your brother into this life-saving service, and——Oh, I  
 “beg your pardon!”

The band is striking up, and the partner who, in turn, has rescued me from Mr. Compton's harrowing recitals, is a successful student of the local dancing school. The stage of one's existence at which waltzing disappears entirely from the programme, making way for supper *in extenso*, is still some years my senior, and as we rapturously dream the dance away, a passing view of Olive industriously pumping “Yes” and “No” from a guileless looking school boy, is the only link to chain my thoughts to the miserable of the world.

### XIII.

The usual Manitoban winter's scene—a brilliantly blue and perfectly cloudless sky, forming a beauteous canopy to what, but for the woods which cast their shadows here and there, would be a sheet of spotless snow, more diamond besprinkled and as pure as the glorious heavens themselves. The painter of a gorgeous Southern sunset might strive in vain to immortalize the brilliant transparency (if one may use a paradoxical expression to describe the indescribable) of those Manitoban nights.

The moon shone down upon a gay and gaudily arrayed toboggan party, beneath whose feet the loose snow whistled and the crusted cracked in cadence quite poetic. The "Zip" of the toboggan and the far resounding laugh when two stray couples met and exchanged some jokes, which all four would agree to christen "funny," the fulness of their hearts and tension of their spirits dispensing with the scantiest criticism, were all the obstacles in that sweet course which, Sophists say, has never yet run smooth. What a task it is to mount the hill on which a slide is placed! I think that it would take less time to climb Vesuvius. To pull a toboggan up a steep incline is no trifle, to be sneezed at. They *will* slip back; the cushions *will* fall off; or the string of the dainty mocassin which holds a daintier foot must needs untie itself (men tell me that the strings on large-sized feet are never found unloosed); and half way up the hill a few thick shrubs will grow, breaking the chilly breeze and forming an utterly resistless resting place, for man (or woman, either, notwithstanding cynics who aver the contrary), cannot work forever without breath. Once stopped, the hosts of accidents now possible are appalling in their number, nature and effect. The lady will remove (or have removed) her glove, to cool the heated palm. Fatality springs up. The glove is lost. Sometimes the hand goes, too. But why should I multiply supposed events? The simple fact is that delays do frequently occur, and whilst our world rolls round, and Time keeps on its way, such accidents will continually arise, and in the years to come will form green spots in many a way-worn heart—for in the stoniest breast there *must* sound notes which tell of Love's existence. The scoffer, in his shallowness, vouchsafes a bitter smile at "sentiment."

And yet, how ignorant must he be who would deny its presence as a keystone in every human action. Man longs and strives for money. To what end? For money's self? The millionaire indignantly denies such charge, and, though he will not enter into definition of the motive of his greed, he has a child, perhaps, for whom he thinks his store too small; the trumpet notes of Fame, at present, are not loud enough for such a jewel as that child. Sentiment! Why slaves the poorer man, day in, day out, year in, year out? For something to enjoy. Enough to keep himself and marry on. (Forsooth!) The bachelor pays so much for a smile. A faded flower is dear, and the wherewithal to purchase it must be obtained. All sentiment! For Sentiment the rich are daily pouring out their thousands in a stream, the poor are starving, and the miserable rashly tearing down the veil which screens Eternity. Though day forms not our dream-time, how many souls there are to whom it represents a nightmare, bringing the sweat of misery from the brow in agony which only draughts from Lethe's stream can possibly assuage. These men live but in the night. Existence dawns when "business" is dead and "Sentiment" holds sway. Let demurrers to my creed ask of their close shut hearts, "At whose shrine dost thou serve?" Ambition's? The joy of conquering others? or conviction that the common herd is low, and you, amongst them, Cæsar? Friends, beware! The would-be hero sacrifices all. Your only guard is value as a step. When a man loves Fame alone, that man is but a devil. History's pages, from the first to that which we are now turning, proclaims this but too plainly. Real nature is but sentiment, and all beyond means a reckless immolation of friends, foes and the Eternal God, whose semblance is

obliterated from the heart, and all outward similarity becomes a lie.

But all this is very far from Winnipeg and our toboggan party, where everything was merry. In spite of the many troubles which had lately come upon me, I enjoyed myself most keenly. The bracing atmosphere was my good friend, as I steadfastly upheld in refutation of some charges made by Olive regarding Mr. Esmond's presence there. He had come up from Montreal the night before and been begged by Jack to join our gathering. (My brother had declined all further *espionage* of me, and let me go my way, hence this thoughtless invitation.) To my inner self I was under no necessity to beat about the bush, and I readily acknowledged my delight at seeing this, the only man whom I had met in Winnipeg to call for second thought.

Olive had now, beyond all doubt and question, succumbed to Captain Warwick's wiles, but she denied it still. I thought it just within the possible (though I never gave her credit for the *rôle*) that she tried my old, old game of "fun," and I ventured on some sisterly advice and kind expostulation. Why, it would never do to have two girls in one small family both followers of the sport. My harvest was not what I had expected, or considered due. Suffice to say I did not touch the pie again, and this resolution seemed to suit the two concerned quite well. None now dared to interfere with their somewhat rude arrangements, which so evidently counted two, the essential number for good company.

The ins and outs, the charms and disagreeables, of these toboggan parties are very quickly learned; and I, having snowballed on the level, moralized on the upward path, and grown excited with the many interesting little

incidents which *can* occur in that short space of time when everyone holds on to the toboggan (as the neophyte and credulous believe) with death-like grip, and had at length grown tired and quite ready for a move in any new direction, or, failing novelty, for home. Nothing fresh appearing, the party all declared in favour of a dance, and a cavalcade was formed, Mr. Esmond and myself being in the van, followed by the rest in couples, at most unstated intervals, all deeply bent on studies of the weather.

"You do not know how delighted everybody is to see you back again, Mr. Esmond. You have been missed most terribly. That's what it is to go away, you see. But, poor fellow, I forgot the pain you must have felt in leaving sorrowing Montreal's attractions, male, female and otherwise, to return to Winnipeg and the untamed savage once again."

"And can this be the once sarcastic Miss Devigne? Excuse me, but do you feel as if old age were overtaking you, or is it only the highly moral atmosphere of Canada which has wrought such change since last I sought to steal a parting glimpse at you through my fast falling tears—and a crack in your blind? Did my ears deceive me, or DID you express delight at my return, and flatter me in half a dozen different ways?"

This won't do, thought I. He's getting quite impertinent, not to say satirical.

"Oh, pray don't begin so early to disbelieve your senses. I dare say there'll be time enough when other people tell you that you've none. However, what I said was quite sincere, as all my sayings are. Since you left town, I've had a large experience. I've heard the jokes, from Adam's very own, down to those of his less enlight-

“ened sons. I’ve had the benefit of every funniosity  
 “which the list of Winnipeg contains, and *now* I’ve ‘got  
 “‘em on *my* list,’ all doubly crossed with red.”

“Ah, that accounts for the serious view you are  
 “evidently taking of this life and the truth of the necessity  
 “for Christian charity which has forced itself upon you?”

“Of course. But please place one good mark to Gov-  
 “ernment House account. I spent an evening there—a  
 “*Musical* it was—I couldn’t find much music, but oh! the  
 “loveliness of Charity! And amongst musicians, too!  
 “They *would* not fight at all. Each one magnanimously  
 “said he’d sink his own superfluous art, and rough it with  
 “the rest. Such harmony! I never *dreamt* of anything  
 “to equal it. Did you ever go up there to music?”

“No, I never had an invitation. But when I die, I  
 “am going to ask St. Peter for a ticket there, instead of  
 “going upstairs. From your description it must outdo the  
 “old style of harp and timbrel very far; and then I hear  
 “it’s *so* select?”

“*Select!* Well, if I were a Yankee, ‘I should smile.’  
 “None but Methodists may enter there—except, of course,  
 “some few “sad examples,” such as I, who just go in to  
 “form the necessary contrast, in order that the pure may  
 “see the misery of our outside world, the depth of which,  
 “if our faces did not play us *very* false, must have been  
 “sufficiently appalling to satisfy the saintliest of them all.  
 “But still, I drank as much of this fine, holy atmosphere  
 “as my poor, sinful body would allow, and then I came  
 “away so thoroughly impregnated with all that’s good and  
 “goody that, even now, I would with rapture welcome  
 “Lucifer himself. What a jolly, pointed tail he could  
 “unfold? (How *very* rude you are to laugh? That’s the

"very best of puns in Winnipeg.) . But, failing him, if you  
 "will just pull yourself together, give your memory a  
 "brush, and call up everything you've done and heard (I  
 "won't attempt to bind you down to truth, provided that  
 "the story's still alive), I'll try you for a substitute."

In spite of all my flattery, he lived, though I fear its subtlety was rather overpowering, and after a grand rally of which (as I honestly remarked) I failed to catch the gist—though I know he meant to say, amongst a host of other things, that I was a genuine angel, a certain indistinctness as to colour depriving his comparison of point—he endeavoured to enliven me with what there was to tell of Montreal and Ottawa (between which places he had acted as a shuttle-cock since he left Winnipeg), and himself. Elopements, of course, came first, and Canada would be poor indeed were she to own herself behind the world of civilization in that exciting detail. Providence takes care that no such slur shall truthfully be cast, and Ottawa can still (in fairly decent seasons) proclaim her home-made scandal second-best to none.

"What an exciting slide that bank would make. How  
 "easily we could slip down," I broke in, as we left a grove of trees and came upon the bank again.

"*Facilis descensus Averno*' still, and that looks very  
 "steep to me. I hardly think it wise, but if your Lady-  
 "ship commands, your servant will obey," getting the toboggan ready with speed somewhat alarming. But I am too great a coward to allow of my adopting any course which shall admit of my being stigmatized as one, and therefore I decided to go down, no matter what it cost. My partner's acquiescence was a good deal more than I had bargained for, especially as the bank might easily, from all

appearances, become, to sinners such as me, the veritable path of Mr. Esmond's author. Shelving slowly towards the river for a time, it then dropped suddenly a depth of fifteen feet or more, and afterwards sloped gently down the bank—the very acme of a fine, exciting slide, but rather risky as regards the jump. However, *noblesse oblige* it was, I felt, and England's fame for courage (what patriotism stirs us five thousand miles from home!) was at stake.

As calmly as I could, I intimated my desire to try and break our necks, and then, without delay, sat down upon the cushion, braced my feet as tightly as was possible in the toboggan, and shouted, inwardly, that all would come out right, though a little whispering voice declared the contrary with very bad effect upon my *toute ensemble*.

"Ready?"

"Yes, waiting."

A push, and off we went, travelling beautifully until the precipice was reached, and on the brink of this our steed seemed gallantly to rear its head, and then we really flew. But oh! how short-lived was our ecstasy, for when we once more struck the earth a sounding crash told plainly of disaster. But the smashing of our vessel's curled up front and a sudden numbness in my foot were quite lost sight of in the one great speculation as to what amount of flesh and blood would, by the Fates' decrees, reach the bottom of the hill; mere details as to shape were never thought about. That point, however, once cleared up—and Providence knows how, for it, I trust, alone bore witness to the sight—I looked about and saw my cavalier some distance from the place where I cast anchor, gathering himself together in a rather startled way, but evidently still alive. The small piece of toboggan which acted as my

seat bore some semblance to a rather large sized shaving, but none whatever to its own identity. The hidden post, on the top of which we leaped, had done great execution. Our eventful ride being over, it was time, I thought, for me to stir and compose myself a little more attractively; and this I tried to do, but my left ankle now raised dissentient voice, and, with a gentle squeal, old human nature readily gave in, allowing me to fall upon the snow, a really thoughtless girl. I cannot have remained in this state very long, and what brought my senses back I never could make out with certainty. I know the first sensation was distinctly nice. Something rather damp, but also warm and soft, was on my cheek. What could that be? Snow, I knew, was cold. That was snow upon my forehead, but this was very different. So, being greatly puzzled, I just lay still, and thought the matter out, with close-shut eyes to aid my meditations. Then there was a little, sibilant noise. The moisture was removed, and explanation rendered hopeless. But a muttering commenced, and, amongst the rest, I thought I caught such words as "Darling" and "Great God," and, marvellous to say, neither excited the horror which they, righteously, should. Instead, I felt a warmth of the heart, and a dizziness of the head, which rendered it imperative for me to wake, but which never mentioned "Insult" or "Revenge," or even whispered that "He was a brute" (as doubtless all my readers would expect), so I assumed that all was right. My faint had been quite orthodox, and my ankle was reality.

The remainder of the party now came upon the scene, having evidently lost themselves and us, and after very much condolence and enquiry, a comfortable litter was

made of a toboggan, and I was placed thereon, the funeral procession moving, as fast as circumstances would permit, to the nearest doctor's house. Here, the patient having undergone a good deal of examination, and not a little pain, it was declared that one of the small bones of the ankle had been broken, but that in all probability I should very soon be well. At this piece of intelligence I distinctly heard Mr. Esmond heave a sigh—not a very marvellous thing, you say, but, somehow, with the hallucination—what you will—so recently experienced, it made me doubt the depths of his *blasé* cynicism. To me, the solicitude with which this man, who posed as soulless, attended to my smallest wants, and the eagerness with which he did his share (and something more than that) in lifting me from the toboggan to a couch, for surgical inspection, and from the couch into the sleigh which took me home, was eminently touching. Jack lectured me the whole way home upon my foolishness and “harum-scarum habits,” doubtless with a man's idea of driving pain away. Luckily for him, I never gave his words a thought, my brain being otherwise employed, though I think, perhaps; I might have followed his remarks in this condition with far more benefit, to both himself and me, than when I had a brain to place at his command—he was then at such tremendous disadvantage.

Upon arriving at the house, I was immediately “retired.” The others came in shortly afterwards, enquired how I felt, and then dispersed; the settled gloom upon the house and Mr. Esmond's face (so I was told) being insurmountable. And then I tried to sleep, but slumber would not come. My thoughts would only own one channel and chant one tune, the burden being, “Mr. Esmond evidently likes you, and you—well, who is flirting this time?”

## XIV.

My ankle did not grow well at once, and I, a restless spirit always but now, for divers good though private reasons, chafed in my close confinement in a way which gave the people doomed to bear with me a sorry task indeed. Three weeks had joined their brothers in the past since the night of the accident, which to-day stands out an epoch in my life not soon to be forgotten. Mr. Esmond, my comrade in adventure, though in this as in all other things, the man had the excitement and the fun, the woman bore the brunt of accident, had visited me constantly, and made his calls more pleasing and acceptable by those little gifts of dainty rareties which Mrs. Grundy allows us to accept without demur, because of their uncommonness. Not that I was now an invalid in the eyes of anyone who lived with me for a day. I hopped about the house and could be tolerably gay upon occasion, until something disagreeable occurred, when my license as a convalescent served me in good stead.

It was a Thursday night, and the Skating Club was hard at work. Winnipeg's young world of fashion, including Jack and Olive (who now were quite content to leave me to my "frightful temper" and a book) had hastened to their favourite *rendez-vous* the Rink—a place with great attractions, where electric lights go out and leave the sweetest little corners in the dark. True, the seat which runs around the hall, interrupted at every five yards in its course by pillars jutting from the wall about three feet, is always crowded at the darkened end, but still, a watchful eye, and quick determination will generally procure a nook, I'm told. A very pleasant place to pass a sentimental hour or so, when everyone appears, for once, by way of

contrast to the icy scene, and to the general tenor of their frigid lives, to thaw quite out, and where the common cause is guarded studiously, for not a solitary scandal has ever yet leaked out.

I was struggling, in my loneliness, with the latest novelist's vagaries, and wondered to what strait the conscientious fiction reader would be pressed within the next few years, in order to supply the imagination requisite to follow up his calling. The door opened, and, without a note of warning, in came Mr. Esmond. I was genuinely glad to see him, and I daresay, as is my wont when I am pleased, flattered him a little. At all events, he soon was in good humour—for himself, that is, for his mood was generally cynical, though mercury itself is not more changeable. And, presently, two easy chairs, not too far apart for sociability's demands, were drawn before the blazing, open fire, which formed one of our house's better points, and confidence soon began to flow.

"The other members of your family have, of course, 'rallied at the Rink?'" said Mr. Esmond.

"Yes, 'and left the world to darkness and to me,' as 'is their uncharitable practice. However, as you've come 'to aid me in distress, I'll not complain, until you've left 'the house, at all events.'"

"Even that's a compliment from you, though it does 'not startle me as once it would have done. Besides, it is 'scarcely more than due as, not so very, very long ago (the 'night is stamped upon my memory forever) you honoured me with a comparison to His Majesty the Prince of 'Darkness' self, so I certainly, by right, should have a 'power to dismiss some of that liege's subjects.'"

"Yes, I should not wonder that is beautifully worked out, but, for some reason, doubtless the murky atmosphere in which your prototype exists, my eyesight is scarce strong enough to catch the dazzling point of your remark without a strain. No, no—pray don't try to make it clear; my brain is dense to utter hopelessness. Oh dear! I *am* bad-tempered, am I not? But then, I am quite an invalid, you know. I think you had better tell a tale, a fairy tale, or ghost story, or something entertaining."

"I've quite given up telling tales because, firstly, I never saw a point in those of any other man, and, secondly, I wasn't able to ensure a quiet, docile audience for the ones I modestly produced myself, the mental prostration entailed upon the few who follow to a crisis being such as gives a warning to the common herd, and they invariably rise whenever I commence with 'That reminds me,' or words to like effect. Therefore, I do not now tell tales."

"Oh! You would not dare to class *me* with the common herd, I hope. I'd struggle with your sharpest point, no matter if it took a week with Webster or Joe Miller to decipher it. I am not usually so condescending, but do you know, on the night when we first met, I felt a strong conviction, which I have never overcome, that you had an affectation of the heart (not medically speaking—something which weighed upon you, and made you cynical. Now, just suppose that I am your confessor. Above all things, I love romance, and in this prosaic life of ours we have so very little apparent to the eye, that I really could not let you go without your contributing your mite. Now, *please* begin. I am going to regard whatever you

"may say as in the strictest confidence, and upon no consideration to be used as evidence against you. Now, one, two, three—Go!"

He did not go. A smile was on his face, and he watched the flickering blaze intently, with lips so tightly pressed that the smile became satiric, and the expression that of a bountiful believer in the evil of mankind, but utter incredulity with regard to any good. It was the face of one who thought he knew the world and its hypocrisy—a face such as the hardy son of toil can never wear. He has no time to spend in metaphysics.

"The only tale I have to tell has nothing loving in it. It might be rather tragic were it not too common and decently related. Being true, however, and one I never told before, to either man or woman, it must naturally lack both polish and excitement. But as I have an ardent wish that you should know me, and everything about me, well, I will try and tell the story, if you will let me turn the light a little lower."

"Oh, of course. That will add to its charms tremendously. But first tell me, is this *really* true, or is it nothing but a fiction, because I want to moderate my sympathies accordingly. I may need a little feeling to be expended on some poor fellow's actual misfortune, for I'm regularly used as comforter at home. (No, I haven't quite duplicity enough to sympathize with women) and I won't waste more than is their due on fancies."

"What I am going to tell you, Miss Devigne, is true. I would not lay it bare without a cause, and do not think that, outside my own immediate family, two people upon earth have heard of it. If my voice at any time gives in, you need not notice it. My voice never was a good one, and I can't hold myself responsible for all its tricks."

He rose; turned down the lights to a decidedly dim and religious stage, drew his chair closer to the fire, and, in doing so, somewhat nearer mine, always keeping his back to what little light the lamps gave forth. I sat as still as might be, and became intent upon what was, I felt, to unfold the mystery of this man's life—the mystery which seemed to hang around him like a cloak, making the unenquiring crowd avoid him as uncanny or a fool.

"My mother came of a good Old Country family, whose name is not unseen upon the roll of those who served their country well in battle and in peace. Her life began, as it has always flowed, in a somewhat curious manner for these enlightened times." At the hour when she was born, in a certain northern county, where superstition even now is not quite dead, there was, within the Hall a certain weird, old gypsy queen, amongst whose reputed powers was that of casting horoscopes. As soon as the infant's sex was known this lady, doubtless thinking to propitiate the servant-maids, and never dreaming of the ire of their master, set to work to shadow out the future of the child, and after much deliberation, she prophesied as follows, a footman writing down each sentence as it came:

"She shall be beautiful; she shall be clever; she shall be much sought after, and have multitudes of friends; she shall be unhappy in her marriage; her friends shall all desert her; and SHE SHALL DIE IN A MAD-HOUSE."

"Such was the incubus with which my mother entered on her journey through the world. When her father heard the details of this fortune-telling, he went almost beside himself, for so many curious incidents have hap-

“pened in the family from immemorial times that superstition is an heritage. The talented authoress of the prophecy was turned out, neck and crop, followed by the educated footman, who had rendered permanent her ravings. The other servants were commanded, on pain of their discharge, to speak of the horoscope to none, particularly was it not to reach the ears of wife or child. As a consequence, my mother to this day is not aware of any of those things which happened at her birth.

“Time wore on. When quite a little girl she won the hearts of all the grooms and villagers by her fearlessness in riding, and skilful management, of a certain demon pony. A few more years, and nature gifted her with such a voice as, according the people of that time ‘to whom I am indebted for these few particulars,’ is but very seldom met with, never without raising interest. To these attractions I must add (though it seems hard that I should have to sing the praises of my mother) a pretty, clever face. The latter attribute was not belied in character, and the country people still recall incidents telling of the court of gay gallants she used to have about her, who would not cavil at the queen-like mode of treatment she adopted. ‘Engaged’ she was a hundred times, I have no doubt; in fact, I think she always *was* engaged, but never for two months to any individual. At last, however, it looked as if the knot would verily be tied. The favoured one was a rich young land-owner, whose acres touched my mother’s parents’ hearts, and they, in turn, by force of much good reasoning, induced her to be wise. The marriage was arranged with all good speed, although the bride prospective plainly told her would-be spouse that in her heart he had but little share; still she would marry him, and he consented to the odd arrangement.

"About this time, when everything, apparently, was  
 "settled, there came upon the scene a gay young French-  
 "man. He stayed with a neighbouring squire and very  
 "soon joined the number of frequenters at the Hall. My  
 "grand-father, as became all good old English gentlemen,  
 "had a nameless horror of the French, and made no excep-  
 "tion in the case in point. To make amends for this  
 "inhospitality, however, my mother would accept the  
 "foreigner's attentions with good grace, comparing his  
 "admirable taste and polished manners with those of her  
 "acknowledged suitor, much to the latter's detriment.  
 "This went on for some little time—meetings at one point  
 "with the Englishman, at another with the French, being  
 "the young damsel's daily routine—until the inevitable  
 "accident occurred. The *fiancé* objected. The interloper  
 "then proposed to put things straight by carrying off a  
 "bride; and the cause of all the trouble decided that the  
 "French had won the day, and she would strike her flag  
 "to none beside. Here was chaos.

"The lady's father bluntly put it thus: 'I would  
 "rather see you carried to the grave than married to a  
 "Frenchman, and if you will persist in running counter to  
 "my wishes, I wash my hands of you and your confounded  
 "husband.'

"My grand-mother was not quite so hard towards her  
 "child. Perhaps a sounding title (even in a foreign  
 "tongue) had some effect upon her. The other members  
 "of the family, saving the eldest brother only, turned their  
 "backs upon the criminal. All of which did nothing but  
 "precipitate a climax, and one fine day, with flags in the  
 "neighbouring port all flying gaily, guns firing a salvo,  
 "and everything auspicious to the last degree, the French-

"man led his hard-won bride to church. My grandfather had been prevailed upon so far (for this was his favourite daughter, and once he could not say her nay), as to allow the marriage to take place from home, though he went up to town. Her one staunch brother gave the bride away.

"The police detained the ousted lover on the threshold of the church, a pistol in his hand. 'Drunk, sir, drunk,' or mad with frenzy—no matter which, he paid all debts in the bitter years to come.——"

A little rustle and the door burst open. Two chairs ran back in opposite directions, of course by accident, and in came Jack, followed by Olive, who looked decidedly done up. I fear the gallant captain did not skate.

"Hello, Esmond, old fellow, consoling our invalid? Perhaps you can throw out some valuable hints on treatment of this terrible distemper—with the accent on the temper—for Olive and I have battled with it vainly, until the shreds you see are all that yet remain of our once noble selves."

"Oh," said I, "Mr. Esmond is a doctor worthy of the name, and grubbed up the root of malady at once. 'Nerves,' said he, and forthwith set himself to work, by means of stories of such ghastly type that the very lights have robed themselves in blue in order to befit the tale's solemnity, to bring these nerves in view, and if you had not rudely interfered, an exhibition was down upon the card to prove my system nervous, no matter what relations say."

"How glad I am we came," from Olive, "for cranky as you are when so-called sane, what *would* you be when 'frantic with hysteria?'"

Decidedly something had gone radically wrong, I thought.

"Why, Olive, dear, you really do not sound as if the rink had quite agreed with you. What can have been the matter?"

"Chiefly mistaken ideas as to my proper sphere of usefulness on earth. Whenever I sat down upon the ice (just to rest, you know), some person would be sure to take me for a curling stone or broom, and push me on in front, clearing the way for them to skate, and nothing but the wildest Indian screech could make the people think I was alive. One man most kindly said (after testing the material by jumping on me several times) I was a brick. Had that been true, he should have been the first to feel my power, for I would dare all Manitoba's scandal and fling myself at his thick head."

The conversation, after a brief recital of the names of those who mustered at the rink, appeared to flag, Mr. Esmond, as his share, doing little more than smile approval, whilst I tried hard to keep my relatives from thinking very deeply of anything concerning me or my affairs. At last the men turned out to smoke cigars on the verandah, and I retired to my room.

Long after all the household was asleep, I turned about in bed from side to side, and thought how little we suspect the romances in real life which run beside us, on the right and on the left, in every darkened corner. Romance! What is romance? Every man who lives for thirty years has memories locked up in his breast which the world at large would ridicule if shown. So each one thinks that *his* experience is unique. He will not tell for fear of being laughed at. He is always in the van of scoffers at "Romance." What egotism and what vile hypocrisy does the breast of man contain! Romance is simply life *au*

*naturel*, with all the creases as they are, unflattened by the roller of money and expediency. The world is full of it, but culture and a plentiful supply of starch and lies have driven us to seek this manna to the hungry soul amongst the works of those whose rare imaginations enable them to bear the title of "Romancers" without one modest blush.

## XV.

The portion of his history which Mr. Esmond had related did nothing if it did not whet my appetite for more, and, being unproficient in the skating art, therefore caring little about entering the lists against Canadian girls, with their many years' experience in the scale, I arranged that my poor scape-goat of an angle should once more be called in use.

On the Thursday night of the week succeeding that in which the events related in my last chapter happened, Jack and Olive went their way without me, as intended, and (also as intended) Mr. Esmond's entrance followed their departure at no enormous distance, brought there, he said, by noticing my absence from the rink.

With very scanty time for salutation, the due consideration of the cold, the lying of thermometers, etc., Mr. Esmond, who had evidently come with purpose tightly bottled up, proposed to go on with and finish, God and myself being willing, the tale he had commenced. For, as he said, "I wound you up for pathos and prepared myself for floods, but circumstances prevented either. This time there shall be no 'Continued in our next.' That's getting quite too old to suit even that rising generation of antiquities called, in unconscious sarcasm, 'children.'"

"Let me see, I had them married, had I not? Yes. They did not start with auspices too bright, even as

" things then appeared, but the intoxication consequent on  
 " marriage, to the ordinary human mind, shuts out every-  
 " thing but bliss, and the world at large becomes a blank.  
 " Eat they must, but simply as you stoke an engine. Sweet  
 " draughts of love from one another's eyes replace the  
 " nectar which the ancients gave their gods, and which to-  
 " day (if sensible idolaters still lingered) would be a cup  
 " from Lethe's stream. But Nature at the altar, so indis-  
 " trictly tying with her tongue that knot which all her  
 " teeth will work upon in vain to loosen, though they may  
 " pull it sadly out of shape, has so effectually put out her  
 " sight with Cupid's bandages that whether she walks over  
 " the precipice of Hell, or mounts the ladder in Eternity,  
 " are matters left entirely to chance.

" My parents were, perhaps, a little blinder than the  
 " great majority (for which that unwashed herd may thank  
 " their stars.) They went everywhere, saw everything,  
 " travelled most luxuriously and knew nothing of the pains  
 " of loving in obscurity.

" But even in the middle of their dream, which doubt-  
 " less looked to them but the natural opening of a cloud-  
 " less summer's day, whose beauty would but grow a little  
 " mellowed as time wore on, mutterings of the never distant  
 " thunder shower rolled along the air, the rumours of a  
 " disaffected France howled menace to their careless hap-  
 " piness. A few more months of life in the Paradise of  
 " Fools, and, with one crash, the stemless torrent of 1848  
 " bore down its frail opponents and in its tide was swept  
 " away the sand foundation of my poor parents' happiness.

" Too proud to ask assistance, and none being promptly  
 " offered, the luckless pair set sail, with the beggarly  
 " amount which misfortune left to them and hearts which

"ignorance enabled to meet the cruel blow, for the shores  
 "that have for centuries impartially provided a living (or  
 "a natural) sepulchre for all such refugees. Here, then,  
 "this wretched couple wandered. One month here and  
 "two months there, and God knows how they lived. He  
 "also knows of what good stuff my mother proved herself  
 "to be. My elder brother and myself were born beneath  
 "the Stars and Stripes, though the places where we first  
 "came on this scene are separated from each other by many  
 "miles. The period of which I now am speaking is one I  
 "know but little of. *Some* money, I have heard, did find  
 "its way from England, though through what channel I  
 "was never told, for 'the real old English gentleman,' my  
 "grandfather, was perfectly relentless, and persistently  
 "declared that his child was long since dead. My mother's  
 "one good brother died, and then—no friends being round  
 "the court (for my grandmother was but a cipher now),  
 "communication ceased, and the old home was no more.

"The seventh year of exile was coming to its close when  
 "my parents once more saw the dear old chalky cliffs. My  
 "grandfather was dead. Just before death's blow was  
 "struck the truth came home to him that he "had made  
 "provision for them all but her who needed most," and,  
 "despite the virtuous indignation of those too soft-hearted  
 "beings whom circumstances made to us relations, the will  
 "was altered until my mother shared alike with the rest of  
 "her dear sisters. This was enough to live on, with  
 "frugality, and the couple had flown homeward, shedding  
 "but scanty tears on leaving far astern the country which  
 "so many boastfully proclaim 'the land of their adoption.'

"Years sped along comparatively smoothly now, and  
 "an addition to the income soon cropped up in an unex-

“pected brand, plucked from the burning of my father’s  
 “patrimony, and rendering their condition easy.

“The friends of youth right loyally stood forth, and  
 “grasped my mother and her husband by the hand; their  
 “only foes the man who still remembered how he lost a  
 “bride, and, naturally, all those who were, in any way,  
 “relations.

“But human halcyon days are short indeed, and these  
 “were not abnormal.

“My father went occasionally to France, to catch a  
 “glimpse of those old faces which he once had known so  
 “well. His visits grew more frequent and protracted, and  
 “my mother accompanied him no more. Then gossip said  
 “the case was like the rest; that underneath these old-  
 “time friendships a woman would be found. The doubt  
 “which gained such tardy entrance to one too faithful  
 “heart was pitilessly turned to certainty. A married  
 “woman’s trail was visible—one in such a station that  
 “scandal would have murdered her outright.

“My mother’s idol shattered, she was herself no more,  
 “and threatened the exposure of a court. My father,  
 “dreading this as worse than death for both the woman  
 “and himself, knew not what healthy breathing was. A  
 “fiend at once came forward to assist him in his need—one  
 “who called my mother’s sister ‘Wife,’ and who, by virtue  
 “of this proud position, had been made trustee for the fund  
 “which my grandfather set apart to provide his several  
 “daughters’ incomes. This gentleman, under guise of  
 “friendship, and feigning his belief in the reality, declared  
 “my mother mad, and showed her husband signs most  
 “unmistakeable and dangerous, which if not dealt with  
 “promptly, might end—well, God forbid that he should  
 “mention it.

"No further argument was necessary. Here was, quite evidently, the one way through the maze, and by quick and thorough action, all trouble could be killed. Of course my father simply meant to gain a little time for settlement; the other parties in the game were after different spoil.

"Where money is, what will a man not do? Doctors were found ready, close at hand, who for a certain fee (perhaps a liberal one) would swear that symptoms of insanity were plain. The man who loved my mother, once (and had waylaid her, overwhelmed with grief, at the too frightful tidings of a husband's guilt, which he had also 'quite miraculously learned,' and proffered her assistance of a kind which was rejected with some heat), now recounted all he 'thought he could remember of a casual interview,' and, somehow, proved the lady mad.

"We will not dwell on trifles. Suffice to say, before my mother had a chance to enter on a suit, a private madhouse held another inmate, and, apparently, the world rolled on the same.

"Time went on, and my mother still remained in durance as insane. My brother, growing older, heard the tale with all its sad embellishments, and soon began to clamour about 'Right.' This seemed to wake my father up (for since the immuring of his wife he had sunk into a kind of lethargy), and he tried again, finally succeeding, to make terms for strict silence on my mother's part. And then her prison doors were opened, and she came forth into the world again, a much changed woman, to be sure. Belief in the powers of evil as overruling all the powers of good, at least upon this earth, had deeply sunk its soul-destroying root, and spread its loathsome trailers over thence laughter-loving heart.

"Since then, my father has become a very 'Wandering Jew' upon the globe. I never know at what place to address him. Money seems to come in sums to satisfy his wants, and enable him to send his sons a cheque at intervals, and, now and then, he turns up in the places where his children are, but after that, relationship is dead.

"The man whose scheme it was to incarcerate my mother is now a common beggar in the streets (if he is yet alive), and where his children are 'tis useless to enquire. His wife is long since dead. 'The mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small.'

"My mother and her eldest son lead a tolerable life at home. He hunts and lives within the income. She reads and entertains her friends, who, with all honour be it said, remain as steadfast as one man, despite the gypsy's warning, the latter part of which is still to come, or prove the lie I trust and think it is. *Par parenthèse*, of course you know my real name is not Esmond, though 'Ralph' I own in honesty.

"Now, Miss Devigne, do you marvel that I'm not quite like the rest of men? Or do you, like them, recoil from one whose breath was drawn in such unhealthy atmosphere?"

"No, Mr. Esmond, I do *not* recoil, and I hardly think the insinuation kind. Have I ever shrunk in your recital? (Pause.) Now, just look at our two chairs, and tell me if mine shows the least disgust?"

Perhaps you won't believe it, but that horrid man put his arms around me and kissed me on—yes, right upon the lips. Did I resent it? Oh, yes! Of course I did. But then, I had so short a time to do it in; I had so much to

say about his story, and was obliged to console the poor old boy a little. Yes, yes, I thought of Fred; you need not revert to that. But there was I, a frail, tender-hearted girl, and just before my eyes the most pitiable (and at the same time loveable) looking creature of his kind. I don't think I could call myself a woman—if my heart had not gone out to him; and (of course I cannot hope to show this now) it seemed as if his heart was also roving round, and these two hearts appeared to call to one another. Then I gave in and settled any scruples by the reflection "What can these minutes matter? There's a life ahead in which you can have misery enough to pay for all sweet moments it is possible to gather." And so we twined our arms about each other, oblivious of everything, and sat quite still—and I was happy; oh, *so* happy!

And the clock struck one. If it had struck two dozen it would have startled Ralph and me considerably less. (Yes, we had arrived at the conclusion that the use of our surnames, in private, would be priggish now, and we began to act accordingly that night.) The evening had vanished, melted in the past. Five minutes since and it was ten o'clock. But what had happened to the other two? Decidedly the best thing Ralph could do was to go and see if the rink was open still.

He stood to say "Good night," and—well, ten minutes afterwards the door had closed behind him, and I, not feeling great alarm about the welfare of either Jack or Olive (they must have been taken to a dance, I thought), went quietly to bed, and moralized till morning, which I may say, here, is quite a common habit with me, and nothing can be argued from the fact on this particular occasion.

## XVI.

The allotted time had almost fled. "Only six weeks," "only a month," had dwindled down to "One week more!" and we were going through our Dance of Death, indeed. It was the last of our series of (if friends are ever to be credited) not unsuccessful meetings, where "*Chacun a son goût*" had ruled in sovereignty as true as any that Thelema's convent could have yielded, and now some of the wonted gaiety was lacking. I do not think it boastful to declare that we made good friends, and the link which bound us was shortly to be broken, possibly—in many cases, probably—never to be welded.

Waltz succeeded waltz, for waltzes nearly always filled our card, and still the corners of that "rookery" upstairs retained their occupants, who only now and then descended from their posts to dance, purely from a sense of what was right, and wore the air of those who are engaged on their "Last waltz" in very truth. "Apart" had died away amidst the silence of applause (if, in these days of satire on things pertaining to a heart, such paradox may pass without a challenge.)

Perhaps the ones who bore themselves most bravely were Olive and myself, because we had most reason to be sad, and consequently, steeled our faces to a pitch far, far beyond the point at which our hearts deserted us. The strains grew louder and more gay, but still no spirits rose. The men made periodical excursions to the smoking-room, but the blueness of the atmosphere remained. I drank a little wine myself, but ideas did not come. The English colony which made our house headquarters was evidently down. Not one of them had done a silly thing for quite an age. No twenty year old joke appeared as whetstone

for the abnormally dull perception of our wits—for wits there were among them, though reward was generally slow, and always less than justice, fifteen minutes grace for discovery of the jests being absolutely necessary to their true enjoyment, and generally time was precious with us. However, we invariably took the fun for granted when we could not see it, and to utilize dear Artemus' precaution in a briefer way, we labelled two or three of our acquaintances "This is a joke," and admirably did the plan succeed. Just then, however, all our jovial men seemed dead, and, when the tone grew irretrievable, I gradually collapsed among the rest, and often caught myself in an attempt to brush away the cobwebs from the Future, and dreaming "Things which never were to be."

Since the evening of Ralph's finishing his tale, some eight short weeks ago (how had they flown!) the world itself was changed, and all seemed different. I had confessed to him the double part I played, and almost hoped to be repudiated. But no; he only seemed to love the more devotedly because of the apparent hopelessness of our affection. How did he strive to "raise the wind," and gain enough for our purposes, but fate was adamant. I once proposed to write to Fred and cancel all with him, but Ralph said, "Wait a while; perhaps *I never* may arrive "at competence, and when you get back to England—(no "slight upon your constancy. The best of us are creatures "of the veriest circumstance)—it is just possible that your "*fiancé* may not be so distasteful as he now appears." And I, though disagreeing in the sentiment, had put the matter off until now I was returning home, and could do it all by word of mouth. Meanwhile, we agreed to live whilst live we could, and love as love we might—the loving of

despair, for something told me that fulfilment could not be; that we had kept our hearts together during these short weeks simply that Old Time's blunt scythe might tear all bonds asunder and leave the jagged edges bare and bleeding piteously, until the course of years should apply its lint, and the grim, dark angel, Death, alone would obliterate the scar.

"Did we enjoy ourselves?" Would a criminal, allowed to spend his last few days in sunlight, the bright, blue sky above him, the verdant grass beneath, and every bush alive with chirping, happy birds, appreciate the beauty of the surrounding loveliness? Just as that criminal were we. The long dull years before us, when we should be apart, and our only peace lie in forgetfulness. Religious solace had we none, and pure "Society" would lend its scorn with liberal hand indeed, were our position known. Our present knew no future, if by "future" you mean "life." Yes, we *did* enjoy ourselves.

Olive was now engaged to Captain Warwick, who, from some unknown source, had raised sufficient influence to gain official recognition of his abundant talents, and an income large enough for two. As things now were, however, he could not leave with us for England. Christmas time had, with its usual beneficence, brought us strict commands to shorten our visit by two months. An uncle had returned from India, and longed to feast his eyes on our entrancing beauty.

And so our stay amongst the savages (who are not so *very* savage, after all), was closing in and leaving older, sadder hearts to mourn life's fruitlessness. One little year ago, and I had scoffed at love—most palpable of snares it was, I said. But soon I fell; and, on that last sad night it

seemed impossible to say how deep the fall had been. But, in the train of my descent came Lucifer's decision. Beyond dispute, it is better to "reign in hell than serve in heaven." Better to bask beneath the rays of an all-conquering love, in utter disregard of what the world is pleased to call "propriety" than dwell, a living icicle, with all impulses dead, among the spiteful, disappointed crowd, who prepare themselves for heaven, where all is perfect love, by satirizing all that's lovely here.

Nearly all our guests had gone. Capt. Warwick and his "property" were lost in some dark, secret corner. Jack was doing what was requisite, as host, to the remaining few, and Ralph and I were sole possessors of the gallery upstairs, or rather of a little niche therein. His arms were tight about me, whilst mine were round his neck. His voice was not the same that night. It had the oddest little break in it, that nearly tore my heart, and raised a lump inside my throat which made my articulation difficult. A single word at once was all that I could manage.

"'Tis time to say 'Good-bye,' dear," he had repeated many times, and yet I clung to him persistently. Some horrible foreboding that this might be the parting of our lives hung, like a clog, about me, and told me that I *must* not let him go.

"Oh, Ralph! dear Ralph! I know how foolish all this "is, but a heavy weight is on my heart, and I feel as if I "*could* not let you leave me. If I were able to brush "*away* the dark presentiment that we shall meet no more, "*I know* I could be brave. Why must you go away? Is "*it not possible to accomplish what you want by telegraph "*or letter? Can I do nothing to assist you, dear? Noth-* "*ing which will keep you with me, or help to bring you**

"back at once? Yes. Here; take this ring. Now, swear  
 "to keep it on your hand until you give it me again. You  
 "know whose ring it is? Oh, never mind. Don't think  
 "of that. It has a charm, I'm told, of returning to a man  
 "who shall be nameless now. As it was given to me,  
 "through me it must go back. You see? You can hand  
 "it me—if go you really must, the next time that we  
 "meet, for it *must* return to 'him,' you know, as soon as  
 "possible."

"But, Nelly, darling, how can I wear another man's  
 "engagement ring? Just think what you are asking me  
 "to do?"

"Oh, please don't look upon it as a ring, but wear it  
 "for my sake. It's nothing but a charm. I feel assured  
 "of seeing that again, and you will naturally be with it if  
 "you but grant me what I ask. Do me that little favour,  
 "won't you? I shall feel so very, very lonely when you've  
 "gone, and that would help to keep my spirits up."

"My darling, do you think, if God there be with  
 "heart of goodness even human, that we *could* be torn  
 "apart? To me it seems impossible. Of ~~course~~, I shall  
 "succeed. Of *course*, all will be well. And, as your whim  
 "about this talisman is overpowering, of course, dear, I  
 "shall do exactly as you wish. Heaven only knows how  
 "I would love to stay forever by your side. But we must  
 "endure some evil to ensure the future good. Telegrams  
 "and letters would never do my work in Ottawa, but I  
 "shall certainly return, bringing good news and your  
 "antique, the day before you expect to start for home, and  
 "that will be a meeting nevermore to;—but let me go  
 "now, dearest."

But still I would not suffer him to leave, and, by my cruel importunities conveyed, through sympathy, some of those foreshadowings of evil which threw such darkness over me; and then, how must the devils who combine against our mortal hopes have chuckled in their glee, and gloried in our misery.

How vain a thing it is to try to follow the workings of two tight-knit hearts, ordained by destiny to separate, during that brief space of ecstasy and agony which immediately precedes the devastation, no teacher but experience can tell. 'Twere foolish to recount the sobs, the sighs—the time-worn perjuries (which the great Clerk Angel surely must blot out), the apparent blankness of the future's page, on which, if aught appears, it is the one word "Misery" scrawled across the sheet—(in spite of which disfigurement fate manages to write, during the years which fly remorselessly along, much interesting matter.)

All these intensities of feeling are crowded into such a space of time that we can say of none "'Tis here" before 'tis gone. A few short minutes sufficed to hold them all, and Ralph had left, and with him went the light. It was not to turn a line the poet said "Love of man's life's a thing apart; 'tis woman's whole existence."

On the day which followed these funereal rites of the gaieties which our Manitoban house had witnessed, Ralph was to travel down to Ottawa, intent upon the capture of an influential cousin's sympathy, and, with that fellow feeling, something tangible in interest and money. The "Hub" of the Dominion's universe appears to be a refuge for all those who, with a pecuniarily feeble constitution, have yet some right good friends at court. Ralph had



many aspirations, some probabilities of actual success, and not a few good parts. Decidedly, without a miracle, things might turn out all right. He made so sure of it that all arrangements were complete for his leaving Winnipeg to make the trip to England with us, after the winning of his victory in Ottawa. Of course, he knew not what he was doing, and when I encountered Mr. Clifford things would be all so nicely settled that the sailing would be plain, if not quite pleasant.

Poor Fred! I fear he was not treated very well. Condemnation came upon him quite unheard. But what a mercy was it not that he had been delivered from a double life, which could not fail to have been miserable? And so the vision of his righteous anger passed away, and dream-land put forth pictures of another hue, where two hearts did truly beat as one. And this fine phantasy continued in one long line of bliss, until the midday sun dispelled all dozing satires, and I woke to dull reality.

## XVII.

The time was come. Our final day in that North land of which my latest hours will bear sweet recollections had faded to a close, and we—the family—were walking to our last festivity.

The English “boys” had put their heads together and tendered us a supper, whose memory should help us to endure the trials of the tedious journey which next morning would initiate. Turning over the disagreeables of the day, I leaned upon Jack’s arm, engrossed in meditation, and stood upon the threshold of our supper-room before I gave a thought to things that be. Jack paused before we entered, and then I woke with something of a start, rub-

bing my eyes to make quite sure I was not dreaming still. Two steps more, and we were well inside a long, high and narrow room, the door of which opened in the centre of the wall, an end one, and after passing through the humble looking portal, one seemed to say good-bye to all things solid and mundane, to launch upon a life of Asiatic bliss.

By some most cunning artifice, tall Eastern plants, exhaling their atmosphere of luxury, forgetfulness and ease, were ranged, presumably on shelves, around the room, and towered one above the other's head, the sides and ends all gradually tending towards one point, until the topmost plants had joined their foliage and made a bower no fairy could despise. Down the middle of this Pixy's grove a table shone with glittering plate and glass. The few exotics which stood upon the board held up their heads, and did not poke their noses into conversation, as is the wont of common dinner-table plants, who oppose a most uncompromising front to any indiscriminate interchange of views. The fruit was not obtrusive, and yet was quite enough for all good purposes. The whole was lighted by two gigantic chandeliers, which shed a pinkish light, by some device, and did away with any of that garish light that spoils so much effect. When, otherwise, a silence would have reigned, the gentle trickling of water might be heard; and on enquiry, if one could raise sufficient energy for that, the noise was found to issue from a fountain at the lower end, which played its soothing tune incessantly. At each of the table's two extremities stood an enormous easy chair, enveloped deep in fox skin rugs, raised to such a height as would meet a supper's prime necessity by a carpeted and cushioned dais.



My first, and doubtless most truly flattering remark, on entering, was commonplace enough; yet "Oh, how beautiful!" was greeted with a good deal of complacency, and raised the thought that, belabour our poor brains as diligently as we may, simplicity will bear away the palm in almost every case.

No one seemed to know how this Southern paradise had come to its maturity in a land not very far removed from the *habitat* of Esquimaux and seals. Each man had done a little, so they said, though to my mind, each must have *done* the people and the town with great impunity; otherwise, from Winnipeg, they never could have raised the wherewithal to do us such royal honour.

I spare the reader details of the disillusionizing way in which that mortal gathering thought proper to amuse themselves in this elysium. 'Tis always hard on one's susceptibilities to see the facts of gastronomic art which fragile-looking beauties will perform, but sure 'tis sacrilege, in such a place, the summit of a god's or fay's ambition as a home, to see great men—and Englishmen with native appetites at that—responding to the lying calls of hunger with hand so liberal that common logic stands aghast and swears that, once for all, she severs her connection with that arch deceiver, Nature.

By general acclamation, I occupied the post of President. Olive was voted in as Vice, but, steadfastly refusing, a working chairman took the vacant place.

Though *atra cura* was, even here, quite visible for some short time, the cloud gradually cleared away, in deference to the stern determination of the gathering to be merry, and good humour having once appeared among us, the infection spread with such rapidity that presently the

fun grew fast, and even verged upon uproariness. We talked, some favoured us with songs, and *how* we laughed! As if there were no better morrow. Jokes dead and buried in the Middle Ages were now remorselessly exhumed, and did their duty with a zest which sadly shewed the wastefulness of life for which the coiners of "the last new thing" will have to give account.

But, suddenly, a hubbub rose, for everyone was saying "Sh!" as if dear life depended on their unanimity. At length the wished-for silence was secured. Our worthy chairman stood upon his legs, and, skipping all usual intermediate toasts, called upon a Mr. Thornton to give his views upon the situation, which, with the "Hums" and "Hahs" of an inexperienced speaker, about to take a plunge into the vortex of an unfathomable mind, in hopes of bringing up a pearl, he did, as follows (for I made him deliver up his notes a little later on):—

"GENTLEMEN,—We are on the eve of a great dissolution, but, being Englishmen, and, therefore, moulded somewhat on the lines of the stoical old Romans (I prefer that theory to the Semitic one), we must, as far as in us lays, endeavour to bear up and emulate those ancients, who saw no ghastly form in even death. Albeit they, in leaving earth, were going to their gods (to drink and have some supper, presumably like this one, if Bacchus was good natured), whilst Fate deprives us moderns of our goddesses, which is "*Fons lachrymarum*" unknown to any of the heroes, according to—hem—hem (hear, hear!)—I won't insult your learning, gentlemen; you know the various authors I refer to, well.

"Devigne by nature as by name, we all must trust—and trust we do (for I know the company is with me on



“ this subject )—( “ Bet your boots we’ll stay with you and  
 “ the subject till to-morrow, if you like ” )—that our deities  
 “ but go before. I would suggest that they were going to  
 “ prepare our paths, but knowing the high odour—of sanc-  
 “ tity, of course—in which some of our number are held in  
 “ their paternal homes—our lively young friend “ Spondee ”  
 “ there, for ready instance, who draws so beautifully on  
 “ his imagination and his mater, one may, without a fear  
 “ of contradiction, say he lives upon his wits—that more  
 “ perfect understanding or affectionate relationship could  
 “ not be desired by our most genuine friends. Be that as  
 “ it may, I feel that we shall meet in heaven or elsewhere,  
 “ and I ask you now, when the sun of Manitoba (our guests  
 “ “ *Duae junctae in Uno* ’ ) is about to disappear, to rise and  
 “ drink to its departing rays, knowing that they will shine  
 “ as brightly—more brightly could they not—in that dear  
 “ old land to which they go, and to which, despite our  
 “ many inconveniences, we all hope to follow in due course,  
 “ for very sunflowers, blessed with legs, are we.”

(Hear, hear, etc., etc., etc.)

A good deal of confusion followed this panegyric, occasioned, principally, by the festive “ Spondee ” ( a nickname given in honour of two very lengthy feet ) who vigorously protested against the “ terrible example ” which the last speaker had manufactured out of him. However, it was passed, *nem. con.*, that such very raw material should be proud indeed to be turned to so excellent an account.

Jack, looking somewhat lost, got up, and was about to set the pump at work upon his brain—a vacuum existed there already, I incline to think—when all the arms within a radius of five yards were stretched at length to

push him down again (it must have been a ladder up to heaven, or out of the lower regions back to earth, to be so interrupted), but still he seemed to think that he was being robbed of something worth a good deal more than any mess of pottage, when it was pointed out that I must speak "Just for the last, you know."

Of course, in maiden modesty, and scarcity of notions, I solemnly protested for a while, then, seeing no way out but by a dash, I rose, praying to the gods for inspiration.

"Friends, Countrymen, and (as you wish to be, I call you) Rum 'uns!—The exhibition of this tenderness quite unwomans me. I feel myself becoming puerile—(isn't that the word?)—and hasten to address you whilst I am in your mood."

"I offer you the heartfelt gratitude of my sister and myself;—I also will include in that small, thankful group, my brother, though, in case you do not know it, I may say of him, with truth, 'The article speaks amply for itself,' and, sometimes, as I know, most superabundantly,—for the glorious way in which we have been fêted, and in which our toast was drunk. To our former large indebtedness, these items will be added, putting us so far into arrears that I fear no earthly power can extricate us. We may but hope that you will be repaid in heaven."

"As each one of you knows, I am not formed by nature for an orator, and always shall prefer to listen to the veriest nothings—sweet or otherwise—to ventilating ignorance in speech."

"That we may meet in England I shall always hope; that we can spend a time as happily as we have done the past few months, thanks to your indefatigable efforts, I must doubt."

"I cannot say to you, *en masse*, what I might swear to each; but then that's your advantage, for you may think it all, and more, too, if you like, so long as you remember that the conversation is *à deux*.

"My sister pours her blessings on you, and I have lost a heart—how the pieces are distributed, I know not; therefore, cannot tell. The only thing which troubles me is that it is so small. One heart among so many—why, there'll be nothing round—so you will act upon 'the square' for once.

"I hope that even when we have really disappeared, and you have swept from off your stage whatever rubbish we may leave behind, preparatory to the coming of some star, occasionally you will waste a thought upon us, and the many hours spent together, in different happy ways.

"And if, through the course of the years which await me,

"Some new scene of pleasure should open to view;

"I will say, while with rapture the thought shall elate me,

"Such were the days we in Canada knew.

And I resumed my seat. Here came ten minutes interval, during which everyone engaged in the laudable endeavour to sing "Auld Lang Syne" quite independently and characteristically. Effort crowned with perfectly astonishing success.

Jack came to the surface once again, to reassert his right as our spokesman and protector, on which he thought the company were trampling most unwarrantably. But "I would say" and "On behalf" was as far as he could get with followers, for it had been previously arranged that just two speeches should be given, and none would tolerate a third. So our brother had to rest beneath his load of gratitude, and give up all idea of chaperoning us again.

Candidly, I must admit that our indulgent brother's tutelage was never quite a tangible affair. The idea of his authority had been a good deal scouted, and doubtless he would, in his heart of hearts, rejoice to see our vessel gradually receding, and leaving but one long, thin line of smoke, quickly to dissolve itself in air, and symbolize the deep impressions which we all create upon the living world. Before the ship should vanish from the sight of those on land, Jack would turn himself about, give his back a shake to make quite sure the incubus was gone, and Voila! We were dead. How merciful a Providence is that which gives to man such happy constitution!

But 'to get back to our mutton.' The conversation very soon was general and free. No stiff-backed etiquette was here, and I was shaking off incipient melancholy (no easy task just then) and preparing to enjoy myself, in spite of having such a surplus over my pet audience of one.

A waiter here brought in a twisted little note, upon a salver, which he handed up to me. I took it, turned it over, saw it was inscribed "The Chairman of the Meeting," and passed it to my deputy. He scribbled something, gave it to the man, who disappeared forthwith; only to return immediately with an addition to our feast—a most unwelcome one to me—though none around the table guessed the idiosyncrasy.

"Mr. Conyers."

And in he strode, amidst an avalanche of "How d'ye do's," "Glad to see you back's" (the latter greeting I advanced to him, rendering the "You" as "Your," which simple innovation was not visible, and gave my feelings an immense relief.)

"I just got in from Ottawa, was told, of course, the news of your departure, and really could not resist intruding on you, even in this too informal way."

Since our mutual experience this man had grown quite odious to me. To be sure I had not seen him after it, and much against my wish I saw him now; but when his face had crossed my mind, a certain loathing always kept the apparition company, and each time I exhumed his memory it was to bury it some fathoms deeper down in what, in flattery, I called Oblivion's Sea. But now, alas! the waves had washed the very body back to shore to threaten misery.

"Our friends can never be *de trop*. I hope we shall impress that truth upon you now, for there may never be another chance, you know; and, should we leave without good wishes, the rolling and measureless ocean would doubtless think that we abused your country's hospitality, and deal with us accordingly. Seriously, I am very glad, indeed, to say "Good-bye" to you. Oh, please don't be so cynical. You know exactly what I mean. I am perfectly in earnest."

I had pushed my chair back from the supper table, and he persisted in following it up, to the evident exclusion of all other of my satellites. There was something fixed and disagreeable about his look which made my nerves vibrate, and, spite of everything, I could *not* prevent my face from growing cold, and, doubtless, pale to lookers-on.

"I don't question your good-will for one short moment, Miss Devigne. I am too thankful for the very smallest mercy at your hands to cavil at the way by which it comes. But the reason I seem to you to sneer is, very likely, owing to my feeling blue (unpardonably so for one who thrusts himself upon this merry meeting (in

“consequence of having been a witness to an accident that happened to a fellow who is well known to nearly all the men around us now (the sight of them brought him to my mind again), whereby he came within a very measurable space, at all events, of losing what he used to call ‘That bugbear, one’s existence.’ Indeed, for all I know at present, he may have gone the entire distance, paid all earthly debts, and satisfied his enemies forever. I was just wondering whether I should wait until to-morrow brings me news of the condition of the patient, or tell the plain, unvarnished facts, as they occurred, and let the fellows know the truth at once. This is what was troubling me, and giving me, perhaps, a look of depression than which nothing could be further from my thoughts.”

“That is not the purest flattery of my conversational powers, do you think? But I shall pass it by on condition that you give your tale to me. In any case, I think, if I were you, I would not tell the people here your news to-night. It would but damp their merriment for no good end. You can, however, let *me* hear it now without the least reserve. My present mood is just the one that doats on something startling—I need it as a tonic—so let us hasten on. Now, don’t say that it’s melancholy—so am I. I could not possibly be more so. ‘Fire away.’”

He did not hesitate, or wait for more persuasion. In fact, I detected almost eagerness to pour the history forth.

“If you command, for me there is but to obey; though I will warn you that the tale is far from being an antidote to ‘blues.’”

“Just four days ago this fellow came from Winnipeg, and put up at the ‘Russell.’ I met him there at dinner,

“and, naturally, was very glad to see a Manitoban once again, and talk of absent friends—not scandal; no. Men never think of that. We turned out for a stroll. The night was simply gorgeous. Not one cloud to be seen. The moon was shining with something more poetic, and very little weaker, than the light of day. The sky was of that transparent blue you know so well, and no square inch of it but, on examination, would show a star or two. The air was sharp and bracing, and the hour just nine o’clock. An unexpected change of weather had brought the winter back again, and snow lay quite thick upon the ground. A sleigh ride was suggested (by him or me, I cannot now remember), and a horse and cutter stood before the Russell House ten minutes later, and we, enveloped in fur coats, prepared to think of Winnipeg. My friend got in and took the reins, and I sprang up beside him.”

“Such a glorious drive it was! Through tall, dark trees, past rippling water (Manitobans never see such trees and don’t know what it is to hear the music of a stream dashing over rocks) and out into the brilliant moonlight.

“Our horse seemed to enjoy the beauty of the night almost as much as we, and jumped about and shied without the slightest provocation—the simple ebullition of high spirit.

“At last we called a halt, and looking at my watch, I found that it was half-past ten, and time, I thought, for us to be returning. So, turn we did, and came, at break-neck speed, towards the town. Going down a long, straight stretch, I thought I saw an object in our path, and, thinking of the freshness of our horse, I said: ‘Do

“you see that black thing in the way? It looks just like a drunken man. Take care.’ But the driver did not seem to hear me. One moment later the horse had shied across the road, and, in his fright, as I at once perceived, though the other fellow did not notice it apparently, stood upon the very edge of the bank above the river, a precipitous descent of thirty feet, at least, with a rugged bed of rocks below. I scrambled out, and as my friend sat still, to all appearances waiting for the horse to move, quite careless of his danger, I walked towards its head, intending to get my hand upon the bit and then to lead the brute into the road again, when, catching sight of me, it gave one start of fright, a snort, a side-long jump, and everything was over! An unconscious man, a mangled horse, and the fragments of a cutter were what was found at the bottom of the bank. The man, or what is left of him, is in the hospital, but whether dead, or lingering on, or really getting better, I am not able now to say. To-morrow may tell more.”

“Well, Miss Devigne, are you not sorry now that you insisted on it? By that knowledge you are placed almost on a level with myself—all around us gay, and yet how grinning death will threaten us.”

“The story is not a pleasant one, most certainly; and it can hardly be a thing that you will care to treasure in your memory. But, by-the-bye, you never told me what the poor man’s name might be. I was on the point of asking half a dozen times, but did not like to interrupt, you were so much engrossed.”

“He was in Winnipeg whilst I was down in Ottawa, these last few months. I hardly know if I should tell or not, but I suppose I might as well divulge the whole of

"my small secret. His name is—DID you ever meet him, "Miss Devigne?—Ralph Esmond."

The lights grew dim, but as they faded two bright eyes shone out. I had seen the self-same eyes, with something of that brilliancy, once before; but now there was an additional expression. My head was in a swirl, but still those devil's eyes remained and glittered. With a spasmodic, superhuman effort, I stood erect, and, stretching out my arms, gave vent to one loud scream. Then the total darkness fell, and I was happy:

### XVIII.

Three weeks hence, and Eleanor Devigne will be a Clifford. The legend of the ring is evidently true. It *will* return to the reigning heir, and with it I shall go, as an appurtenance. But the history of that ring contains some chapters closed as with the seal of Fate, of which its master's hand will never turn a leaf. Chapters full of an overwhelming tenderness, yet bearing in on *me* the bitterness of Dead Sea fruit. Parts of the tale of a buried love, such as my heart can never know again, are these, connected with which story I have but one little, tear-stained relic, surviving heaps of accumulated worthlessness, whose destruction cost a depth of mental anguish far beyond the power of pains corporal to wring, and prized beyond the scale of any earthly things. 'Tis nothing wonderful—nothing rare. A simple scrap of paper, unbeautifully headed with the miserable engraving of a Canadian hotel, and it served as wrapping for the talismanic ring on its last journey from a northern land. Yet, steeled to agony as my poor bosom has become (thanks to a liberal training during six long months) I cannot even now look on that

sheet without a dimness of the eye and aching (yes, yearning), of the heart which speaks too plainly of a passion not yet dead, though propriety, the world and common sense (how I hate the combination, one and all!) would dictate its burial forever, five feet deep in cold Canadian soil, with the author of the few sad lines (now very nearly blurred into illegibility by drops whose coming caught me unaware) which scrawl across that page.

MY DARLING:—It is not to be. Could I but kiss those fond lips once again before the barrier falls forever. The darkness closes in and I can write no more. Nelly, dearest one, good-bye. Remember *how* I loved you.

And that is all my treasure. The note can make no boast of even signature.

"Not *very* extraordinary," you say. No. 'Tis nothing but the headstone of my broken heart, a bagatelle, at best. 'Tis not of interest to the gaping crowd to know that with that scrawling "you" (the identity of which word is part faith with me) ebbed out one (yes, surely two, for what remains to me but husk and recollections?) worthless human lives. It would take up valuable time, which might be advantageously and amusingly expended in calculating probabilities of stocks, the chances of some "dark youngster" for a race, or the charming symmetry of "Cupid" in the ballet, to tell how he, who, three or four short nights before, breathed Love's mad assurances in my ear, and ever and anon pressed to my own his warm, sweet lips, seeming to draw another life therefrom, in scribbling those few half-formed characters, had spent the whole of that short, lucid interval which Providence had granted him between the occurrence of the accident and the laying on of death's relentless hands.

"In any case," they say, "'tis none of our concern." And they speak truth. 'Tis mine alone. It only comforts *me* to know that, tightly clasped in two cold hands beneath the cruel soil of a far-off, stranger land, there is a golden locket, inscribed "E. D.," which holds a little curl of hair, in colour not unlike the coil which now lies loose upon my shoulder, and hangs upon this sheet, which I am covering with scrawls. That locket bears the intermingled kisses (he insisted on my kissing it when the gift was made and we were full of hopefulness) of two sadly foolish humans. One has already solved the Future's problem, and the writer of these lines looks forward to the coming of a day when Eternity will be inscrutable no more, and when, she trusts and hopes, the counterparts of souls will be united.

In the meanwhile a marriage will occur, and, as the phrasing of the day may put it, "The bridegroom and the bride looked well, and will make a happy couple."

Yes, do you hear that Wedding March? No. 'Tis nothing but the organ of the old Cathedral as it bellows forth the grand "Dead March in Saul."

Flirt! flirt! Men, women, children, flirt your lives away! But, oh! beware lest love, in some unguarded moment, should thrust a peace destroying dart behind your shield. Had I not so plenteously despised the enemy, and but maintained a line of conduct in accord with my belief (which, by the way, was always what it is), how many pains and troubles would have been eschewed! I cannot now declare, with certainty, that my negligence is bloodless.

Flirtation was (and still would be, had I not, in the maddest moment of my life, fallen from the pedestal of

Wisdom), the purest happiness to me. It can but rank as anodyne to-day—thanks to my unforgiven weakness. But you—take good advice, and flirt! flirt! flirt! Yet accept the warning of my One Mistake.



